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**Cover:** View of the Castellammare pedestrian bridge over the Pacific Coast Highway north of Santa Monica, California. The Mediterranean Colonial structure in the foreground, with its red tile roof, was originally Thelma Todd’s Sidewalk Café. It now houses Paulist Productions, a religious media company. Photo by Morgan P. Yates, 2011.



# “THE MEN WERE LEFT ASTONISHED”:

## Mexican Women in *Las Juntas Patrióticas de Señoras*, 1863–1866

By Paul Bryan Gray, David E. Hayes-Bautista,  
and Cynthia L. Chamberlin

**ABSTRACT:** Following the Mexican victory at Puebla on May 5, 1862, Mexicans in California formed patriotic assemblies, *juntas patrióticas*, to provide support to Mexico's defense against the French intervention. Between 1863 and 1866, eight women's organizations, *juntas patrióticas de señoras*, were formed. Their leadership, rhetoric, fund-raising, and extension to other causes indicate that Latinas in California were significantly informed, politicized, and independent.

**Keywords:** *juntas patrióticas*, Mexican women in California, women's political work 1860s, Latina activism 1860s, French imperialism

In 1862, Mexico was in a desperate situation. It had just ended a brutal internal conflict called the War of Reform between the liberal armies of Benito Juárez and those of the conservative opposition. After a long struggle, the liberals had prevailed, installing Juárez as president in 1861. The country was ruined and impoverished by civil war, unable to pay its external debts. After Juárez suspended payment on obligations to France, Great Britain, and Spain, troops of the three nations occupied the port of Veracruz. Great Britain and Spain soon withdrew, but an aggressively imperialistic French



government regarded Mexico's prostrate condition as an opportunity to take possession of a large part of the North American continent. France disembarked thousands of soldiers at Veracruz with the intent to forcibly occupy Mexico.

The French invasion of Mexico was met with armed resistance. Most of the country's people were outraged by the attempt of Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, to make Mexico part of his empire. On April 27, 1862, nearly 6,000 French troops under the command of Brigadier General Ferdinand Latrille, Count of Lorencez, began a march on Mexico City following the same route taken by Hernán Cortés in 1519. The liberal government of President Benito Juárez sent the Mexican army to stop the French at Puebla, a town on the road to the capital.

On May 5, 1862, some 4,000 Mexican soldiers defended Puebla from an overconfident, nearly suicidal frontal assault. The French troops made their approach across an open muddy field into a barrage of Mexican fire. About 500 French soldiers were killed, forcing a retreat from Puebla. It would take the French another year to organize a reinforced second attack on the city. Meantime, news of the Mexican victory set off celebrations throughout the republic. The thirty-three-year-old commander of the Mexican forces at Puebla, General Ignacio Zaragoza, was the object of enormous adulation. The liberal government honored him by renaming the city Puebla de Zaragoza.<sup>1</sup>

Mexican citizens living in California were also jubilant over the successful defense of Puebla. When word of the triumph finally arrived in Los Angeles about three weeks after the event, a popular fiesta was held with stirring patriotic speeches and a procession through the streets led by a band.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a spontaneous series of celebrations erupted among Mexican communities in northern California beginning May 27, 1862, at the mining town of Columbia in Mariposa County. A Mexican resident there reported the joy of those who commemorated France's defeat with cheers, gunfire salutes, and toasts in honor of Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

Mexican nationals could be found throughout California in the tens of thousands. Some were located in urban communities while others worked on farms, ranches, and mines. They were joined by a

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1. German List Arzubide, *La Batalla del 5 de Mayo* (Mexico D.F.: Ediciones Margen, 1962), 57–69.

2. Los Angeles *Semi-Weekly News*, May 27, 1862.

3. *La Voz de Méjico*, May 29, 1862.

smaller number of Spanish-speaking residents, the *Californios*, born in California when it was still a Mexican province. Both groups felt more or less detached from the United States. Their sense of national identity and patriotic feelings centered on the ancestral homeland to the south. Almost all favored the liberal government of President Benito Juárez. News of the French invasion threatening Mexico's independence and sovereignty aroused the greatest indignation among them.

Anxieties over the French invasion created a huge demand for news about developments in Mexico. A small Spanish-language newspaper in San Francisco, *La Voz de Méjico*, soon emerged as the leading source of information on the crisis. The journal was one of very few in California at that time that Mexicans could read in their own language.<sup>4</sup> It was begun March 29, 1862, by Henry Payot, a French-speaking bookseller and publisher from South Carolina, to promote his Spanish-language publishing endeavors.<sup>5</sup> After he made Manuel E. Rodríguez and Antonio Mancillas the editors in October 1862, the nature of the little publication radically changed. Both men were Mexican patriots passionately opposed to the French invasion. They bought out Payot and transformed the *La Voz de Méjico* into an advocate of Mexican nationalism and resistance to the French.<sup>6</sup> The paper became largely devoted to the struggle of Mexico's liberal government for survival.

An article from the Mexico City newspaper *El Monitor*, reprinted in *La Voz de Méjico* August 26, 1862, had an impact on California no one could have predicted. It was the impetus for a surprisingly sophisticated network of organizations in California designed to aid the liberal government in Mexico. The article was entitled "An Invitation to Mexicans." It urged the formation of patriotic societies to raise money for the war against the French. The idea of providing financial assistance to fight the invaders was enthusiastically adopted by Mexicans in California. From their position outside the theater of war, it offered a way for them to do something to assuage their patriotic feelings.<sup>7</sup>

4. David E. Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, Branden Jones, Juan Carlos Cornejo, Cecilia Cañadas, Carlos Martínez, and Gloria Meza, "Empowerment, Expansion, and Engagement: *Las Juntas Patrióticas* in California, 1848–1869," *California History* 85:1 (2007), 4–5.

5. Henry Payot File, Historical Society of California, San Francisco.

6. *La Voz de Méjico*, March 5, 1863.

7. *Ibid.*, August 26, 1862. Hayes-Bautista, et al, "Empowerment," 15–16, identifies Mexican nationals, *Californios*, and immigrants from elsewhere in Latin America as activists in California's *Juntas Patrióticas*.



On September 2, 1862, *La Voz de Méjico* published a letter from a group of Mexicans in the mining town of Placerville advising the newspaper that they had formed an organization to collect funds for the war in Mexico. They called themselves La Junta Patriótica de Placerville. The letter included a list of members and the amounts they contributed. It stated that they were inspired to mobilize after reading the *El Monitor* article published just a week before in *La Voz de Méjico*. The source of their organization's name was not given, but was no doubt taken from references to juntas patrióticas in Mexico that occasionally appeared in *La Voz de Méjico*. For example, the July 31, 1862, edition ran a story about a group in Mexico called *La Junta Patriótica de Zacatecas* that had gathered 1,225 pesos for the Mexican army.<sup>8</sup>

Within a week after receiving notice that Placerville had formed California's first junta patriótica, Mexican leaders in San Francisco organized one of their own on a grander scale. *La Voz de Méjico* announced September 9, 1862, that La Junta Patriótica de San Francisco was formed at a large meeting in their offices. Suddenly, juntas began to appear in cities, towns, and mining camps everywhere in the state. Their rapid spread overwhelmed *La Voz de Méjico*. Each new junta was announced in the newspaper with a list of its members and their contributions of money. Formation of the largest organization, La Junta Patriótica de Los Ángeles, was noticed by the paper on October 9, 1862. It was soon joined by the nearby Junta Patriótica de Wilmington. The only major communities that remained without a junta were Santa Barbara, San Juan Capistrano, and San Diego. Elsewhere, the juntas began to dominate Mexican civil life.<sup>9</sup>

As the burgeoning juntas became aware of each other through announcements in *La Voz de Méjico*, the newspaper took on a double burden. It both reported news on the French invasion and acted as a communications hub for the juntas. Correspondence from junta presidents was published reporting activities, concerns, and amounts of money raised. Letters responding to such correspondence were also presented in *La Voz de Méjico*. In this way, the juntas were kept

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8. *La Voz de Méjico*, July 31, 1862; *juntas patrióticas* can be translated as "patriotic assemblies."

9. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1862; *ibid.*, October 9, 1862.

informed about one another and made part of a vast network operating on behalf of Mexico.

By a kind of natural consensus, San Francisco was selected as the point for transmission of money to Mexico. An executive committee called La Junta Central was formed to receive contributions from juntas in the interior and send the funds to Mexico. It was organized with meticulous formality. The October 25, 1862, *La Voz de Méjico* reported the drafting of documents called "Organic Statutes of the Junta Central" to regulate its operations. The treasurer was required to post a bond to insure his fidelity and provide a guarantee against misappropriation of money.<sup>10</sup>

The whole junta movement was imbued with the greatest seriousness. From the Junta Central down to improvised juntas in mining camps, the members insisted on strict propriety in their proceedings. Every junta had a constitution or other charter setting out the rules by which it would be governed. A president, secretary, and treasurer were invariably elected. Meetings were conducted according to norms of parliamentary procedure, with minutes recorded by the secretary. Such formality resulted from a belief that even though the juntas were outside Mexican territory, the members were involved in important matters affecting the homeland.

During early May 1863, demoralizing news reached California: Puebla had at last fallen to the French. On April 17, 1863, after a two-month siege, the outnumbered defenders surrendered Puebla to a French army of 28,000 men, several times more than the forces they had mustered for their first assault on the city. The basic cause of the Mexican capitulation was a lack of food and ammunition. Some 16,500 starving Mexican soldiers were taken prisoner because logistics made it impossible to hold Puebla any longer. The new French commander, General Elie Frédéric Forey, entered Mexico City on June 3, 1863. A week before, President Benito Juárez had moved his government to San Luis Potosí, a provincial capital 400 miles north of the capital.<sup>11</sup>

To junta members, a particularly galling aspect of Puebla's capture was the participation of Mexican conservatives on the French side. Like the majority of people in Mexico, the juntas were aligned

10. Ibid., October 25, 1862.

11. Jack Autrey Dabbs, *The French Army in Mexico* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1963), 42-49.



with the reformist Liberal Party of Benito Juárez and the democratic constitution enacted in 1857. However, a large conservative minority was opposed to democratic reform. Instead, they believed that political power should be in the hands of a small traditional class of aristocratic landowners.<sup>12</sup> The Catholic Church, allied with the wealthy elite, saw the liberal reformers as anti-clerical enemies. Some conservatives welcomed the introduction of the French Empire into Mexico, regarding it as a civilizing influence and protector of upper-class privilege. One conservative general, Leonardo Márquez, raised a military force to support the French. When the invading army entered Puebla, high-ranking Catholic clergy greeted the French by celebrating a mass in their honor. California Mexicans regarded all those who cooperated with the French as having betrayed their country. *La Voz de Méjico* seldom mentioned the names of French sympathizers without accusing them of treason.

*La Voz de Méjico* published some correspondence from Los Angeles on July 16, 1863, that might surprise current-day readers. It consisted of a letter from Francisca Manzo de Cavazos to the Junta Central in San Francisco announcing she had formed a junta made up entirely of women, called La Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Los Ángeles. She attached the text of speeches she and two other women had delivered at the inauguration of the junta on June 28, 1863. The newspaper printed the letter and the speeches under the heading "The Mexican Fair Sex in Los Angeles."<sup>13</sup>

The communication from Francisca Manzo de Cavazos did not suggest that she formed La Junta Patriótica de Señoras as an auxiliary to the already existing men's group. She wrote that her anguish over the fall of Puebla inspired her "to convoke the women of the city to form a new junta patriótica." Her motive was "to comply with the sacred duty imposed on me as a Mexican woman to render some small service on behalf of my beloved country." She further reported "my fellow women citizens have done me the honor of electing me their president."<sup>14</sup>

The Spanish word used by Cavazos to describe her position in the Los Angeles women's junta was *presidenta*. By substituting the

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12. Jasper Ridley, *Maximilian and Juarez* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992), 6–10.

13. *La Voz de Méjico*, July 16, 1863.

14. *Ibid.*

letter “a” at the ending of *presidente*, the noun was given the feminine gender, meaning that the person holding the office was female. The same could be done with other words such as senator or governor—*senador* or *gobernador*—by adding the letter “a” to them. But there was no such thing as a *senadora* or *gobernadora*. Readers of *La Voz de Méjico* understood what was intended by the word “presidenta,” but they had likely never heard or seen it before. While women did not have the vote in Mexico and could not hold public office, they did have a history of expressing grievances in petitions to government officials.<sup>15</sup>

La Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Los Ángeles was the first group formally organized by Mexican women in California for a political purpose.<sup>16</sup> The female junta was an extraordinary venture outside the realm of the household that pushed the limits imposed on women. The social order of the day was based on patriarchal notions prevailing in both Mexico and the United States. While Miroslava Chávez-García emphasizes the social convention that demanded that women accept male domination and confine themselves to child-rearing and domestic activities under the direction of their husbands, Mexican women petitioners justified their insertion into the male realm of politics as their responsibilities as mothers and the educators of future citizens.<sup>17</sup>

Juntas composed exclusively of women were probably not initially seen as a threat, the men considering them as subordinate groups. This perception must have altered as women began to intervene in the administration of the Junta Central and assert themselves on terms of near equality.

15. Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1985), 40, 42–43.

16. See Kristine Ashton Gunnell, “Women’s Work: The Daughters of Charity Orphans’ Fairs and the Formation of the Los Angeles Community, 1858–1880,” *Southern California Quarterly* 93:4 (Winter 2011–2012), 373–406, for women’s philanthropic work.

17. Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 28. Although this justification parallels Linda Kerber’s construction of Republican Motherhood, there is no evidence of cultural transfer from the U.S. The same concept was current among French and British Enlightenment thinkers. Arrom, discussing a women’s petition published in Guadalajara in 1856, concludes, “Although both groups justified women’s intrusion into men’s affairs as an extension of traditional female roles, the petitions in effect represented a break with those roles. Relying on the image of motherhood to legitimate women’s political activity, the petitioners played on the ideal separation of women from politics to increase their effectiveness.” Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City*, 43.



The organizational meeting of the Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Los Ángeles was well-publicized in *La Voz de Méjico*. It was the first women's junta and an example for those that followed. As president, Francisca Manzo de Cavazos was the first to speak. She greeted her audience by addressing them as *Conciudadanas*—fellow citizens—using the feminine plural of the noun, indicating that her remarks were exclusively directed to the women present. She began, “I am a Mexican, a woman, and my heart is pained when I think of the sacrifices that the Mexican people are making to defend the independence, liberty, and honor of my country.”<sup>18</sup>

Cavazos told the women that it was their duty to make monthly contributions to support “our brothers in the glorious defense of our homeland.” She believed that women could never be excluded from important matters affecting their country:

If our physical weakness does not permit us to bear arms in defense of our liberties, this does not exempt us from the misery and humiliation brought by tyranny. If our sex separates us from politics or discussions on matters of state, we are not thereby deprived of the common sense to appreciate liberty and prefer to sacrifice our lives rather than endure the chains of oppression.

The role of women, according to Cavazos, was different than that of men but no less important. She told her audience, “The mission of women on earth is one of love and consolation.” The part played by women was to “cheer and console the unfortunate, to be at the side of those near death, to wipe the sweat from a soldier dying for his country, to receive the last sigh of the martyr for liberty.”<sup>19</sup>

Like her entire audience, Cavazos deeply lamented the recent loss of Puebla to the French. She related the sad fate of Mexican prisoners who were being taken for confinement to France and also shipped to isolated camps on the island of Martinique. In emotional terms, she evoked images of the wives and mothers of dead soldiers and those still slowly dying in hospitals. Her detailed knowledge of recent events in Mexico must have largely come from newspaper accounts, meaning that she was literate and as well informed as the men in Los Angeles. She knew the identity of the new French

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18. *La Voz de Méjico*, July 16, 1863.

19. *Ibid.*

commander, General Forey, and described the exact positions held by the Mexican army when they surrendered Puebla.<sup>20</sup>

With those attending disturbed by her moving account of suffering in Mexico, Cavazos proposed that they take an oath. She urged them to swear that they would raise their children as implacable enemies of anti-democratic governments like the French Empire. Solemnly, she asked for an oath to that effect:

Mexican women, let us swear before the God of our fathers to give all our support to the maintenance of our democratic principles, wherever we may find ourselves; let us swear to emulate the worthy women of Sparta in order to inculcate in our children the principles of democracy.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, *La Voz de Méjico* contained a footnote concerning the oath. It was the work of a male correspondent in Los Angeles who was shocked by the vehemence of the women. His footnote stated: "All the women stood up and raised their hands to swear, but in such a forceful manner that the men were left astonished."<sup>22</sup>

After condemning Mexicans cooperating with the French, Cavazos told the women assembled that she would like to send a message to Napoleon III: "If all the Mexican men die, we women will remain and transform ourselves into soldiers with rifles in hand . . . we will die like heroines, worthy of being called Mexicans." In a traditional but dramatic manner, Cavazos ended with a tribute to Puebla, the goals of the Liberal Party, the president, and the commander of the Mexican forces: "Long live the defenders of Puebla! Long live independence, reform, and the liberty of Mexico! Long live Juárez and Gonzáles Ortega!"<sup>23</sup>

A short speech by a Los Angeles resident, Teodocia Enríquez de González, came after the emotional performance of Cavazos.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid. Manzo de Cavazos's mistake in referring to Sparta as a democracy might have stemmed from the California Spanish-language newspaper *El Clamor Público*'s quotation of a speech by Sra. Muñoz de Ruiz de Chávez in which the same mistake was made (*El Clamor Público*, July 4, 1857) or from the popular informative dictionaries published in Mexico that provided short identifications of terms for women's self-improvement. The errors contained in these dictionaries were repeated in women's publications such as *La Panorama*. See <http://www.coleccionesmexicanas.unam.mx/revistas.html> under "Búsquedas por Revistas."

22. The correspondent to *La Voz de Méjico*, July 16, 1863, wrote: "*Todas las concurrentes se pararon y alzando la mano juraron; pero con un carácter tan indignado que dejó atónitos a los hombres.*"

23. *La Voz de Méjico*, July 16, 1863.



González encouraged the women not to think of themselves as powerless. To illustrate this proposition, she cited the example of Joan of Arc, a girl who changed the course of European history. She asked them to reflect on the life of Charlotte Corday, who slew the tyrant of the French Revolution, Jean-Paul Marat. Finally, she evoked the figure of María Leona Vicario, whose name all the Mexican women recognized, a leader in the struggle for Mexico's independence, popularly known as the "lioness." Gonzalez conceded, "The use of weapons is not given to us," but asserted that women could nevertheless participate in the fight with France in other ways. Since the women in Los Angeles were too far from Mexico to join the struggle, the best they could do was "to send our modest donations to the army defending the nation."<sup>24</sup>

The July 7, 1863, edition of *La Voz de Méjico* printed a list of contributions collected by La Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Los Ángeles at their first meeting. The donations ranged from ten cents to five dollars, provided by 116 women. The prevailing daily wage for unskilled laborers was about one dollar. Those contributing that amount made a significant sacrifice. The list distinguished between the Spanish-surnamed donors by nationality and race. There were sixty-nine women born in Mexico, twenty-five from California, nine Indian women, five female children, one Chilean, and seven anonymous contributors.<sup>25</sup> The presidenta, Francisca Manso de Cavazos, was born in Guadalajara in 1823 and married to Francisco Cavazos in Monterrey, Nuevo León, in 1856. Her husband was a member of the male Junta Patriótica of Los Angeles. Speaker Teodocia Enríquez González was listed as a seventeen-year-old dressmaker in the 1860 census for Los Angeles County. She was married in that year to Gregorio González, and the marriage record indicates both were born in the state of Sonora. The 1870 census identifies Gregorio as a laborer. In 1863 he served as president of the male junta in Los Angeles.<sup>26</sup>

These were ordinary women and relatively poor. Almost none had names associated with wealthy Los Angeles families. The majority were undoubtedly residents of Sonoratown, the Mexican

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24. Ibid.

25. *La Voz de Méjico*, July 7, 1863.

26. Latter-Day Saints Family Search website (familysearch.org); *La Voz de Méjico*, June 6, 1863 and November 25, 1862; Los Angeles County marriage book 1, 52.



Washington Street, Sonora, California, in the 1860s. In September 1863, forty-six Mexican women of the town formed California's second Junta Patriótica de Señoras to support Mexico's defensive war against the French invasion.

*Lawrence and Houseworth Albums. Washington Street, Sonora, Tuolumne County—From City Hotel, c. 1860–1870. Gift of Florence V. Flinn. The Society of California Pioneers.*

quarter north of the plaza. Individual contributions were modest; forty-seven gave 50¢, thirty-five gave 25¢, four gave 10¢, and twenty-nine donated one dollar or more. Just one person, Tomasa Badillo, gave five dollars. The total amount collected was \$64.24, a fair amount at the time. The next two months saw contributions of \$68.25 and \$54.62. Although the president, Francisca Manzo de Cavazos, had to occasionally chide the members for failing to make regular donations, the women generally kept up a monthly flow of money to Manuel E. Rodríguez, treasurer of the Junta Central in San Francisco.<sup>27</sup>

About three months after the establishment of the women's junta in Los Angeles, a second one was formed, September 30, 1863, in the mining town of Sonora, 112 miles east of San Francisco. The event was reported at length by *La Voz de Méjico* on October 10,

27. Ibid.

1863. Some forty-six Mexican women gathered at the home of María Noriega, who called for the meeting. Noriega addressed the women and frankly stated that the junta was being formed "in imitation of the junta already organized in Los Angeles." She made a short, but emotional speech calling for regular monthly contributions "to aid our soldiers who are shedding their blood to save Mexican independence and avenge the honor of our country so outrageously violated by French despotism."<sup>28</sup>

A third women's junta soon appeared in San José. The organizational meeting of October 15, 1863, was convened by Teresa Díaz de Casanova and held at her home. She made a speech reported by *La Voz de Méjico*, November 5, 1863, acknowledging the example of Los Angeles in forming a new women's junta. Casanova told the group, "We are here because we endorse the praise worthy and patriotic acts of our sisters in Los Angeles." Her speech mirrored those given at the first women's junta meeting in Los Angeles, perhaps because she read the earlier speeches in *La Voz de Méjico*.<sup>29</sup>

Casanova's speech called upon women to recharge the mission of the California juntas. Her appeal to women was probably based on an incident mentioned in the November 20, 1862, *La Voz de Méjico*, in which the male junta had turned to the same Teresa Díaz de Casanova to help it collect money in the shortest time possible by collecting from women.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the male junta in San José had sought the help of a woman because its collection from men was lagging. Now this strong woman was urging the women to reinforce the men's efforts. She told her audience she was saddened to see the ardor of her fellow countrymen (*nuestros compatriotas*) cool after the fall of Puebla and she urged the "weaker sex" in her audience to follow the laudable example of the Los Angeles Junta de Señoras and "to rise up and carry your heads high, putting all your resources at the service of Mexico's struggle for independence and liberty."<sup>31</sup>

An editorial by Antonio Mancillas in *La Voz de Méjico* on November 12, 1863, took up the theme of the weakening of patriotic

28. Ibid., October 10, 1863.

29. Ibid., October 15, 1863.

30. Ibid., November 20, 1862.

31. Ibid., October 15, 1863. There were a number of cases of women being named by male juntas to collect donations from female members in towns that did not have a women's junta. Hayes-Bautista et al, "Empowerment," 11.



enthusiasm in the wake of Puebla's fall, specifically citing Díaz de Casanova's speech. Mancillas laid this fault squarely on the shoulders of male junta members. He deplored "the sad fact of the decline observed in the men's patriotic subscriptions," and applauded the women's junta for calling attention to the weakening of men's patriotism following the occupation of Puebla. He saw this as a general phenomenon among the male juntas' membership, not merely a problem localized to San José. Having said this much, Mancillas went on to express the hope that his judgment was too severe. He urged his readers to be even more generous with their donations in future, for troubled times required greater sacrifices. It was easier, he pointed out, to give a little money than to take up arms to defend one's native soil. Then, in case that wasn't enough to shame his readers into more ample generosity, he praised the women's junta for demonstrating a purer patriotism than those whose efforts had started to weaken. His implication was obvious: if mere, weak women could pick up their patriotic efforts in the face of a reverse, then surely the men could do better than they had of late. No self-respecting Latino man of the period would have wanted to be thought less resolute or less patriotic than a woman; he especially would not want women to view him in that light.<sup>32</sup>

The women of other towns joined to form juntas. The last women's junta set up in 1863 was also inspired by the example of Los Angeles. It was the Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Marysville, established November 22 at the residence of Andrea B. de Castañeda. Two short speeches were made on that occasion by Carlota Y. de Bojorques and Laureana Cárdenas de García. Bojorques told the group: "This meeting is to respond to the invitation of the women of Los Angeles to all Mexican women in California to imitate their example by forming a women's junta." The speeches, although rousing, were similar to previous ones made on such occasions and published in *La Voz de Méjico*. The proceedings in Marysville, about forty miles due north of Sacramento, were noticed in the newspaper December 15, 1863. It mentioned an unusually large number of

32. *La Voz de Méjico*, November 12, 1863. In the next issue, November 14, Mancillas followed up by pointedly printing an extensive list of contributions made by women and children in Sonora, Robinson's Ferry, Columbia, and San Andreas, amounting to a combined total of \$818.89. In that issue, he printed only the list of the women's contributions, not any by adult men in those or any other communities.



A carte-de-visite portrait of Teresa Salas, about 1872. Salas was a member of the Sonora Junta de Patriótica de Señoras. Sewell's Art Gallery, Sonora, California. *Courtesy California Historical Society, FN-36623/CHS 2010.373.tif.*

officers elected at the meeting and “the junta session closed with much enthusiasm prevailing among its members.”<sup>33</sup>

By the end of 1863, women's juntas had been formed in Los Angeles, Sonora, San José, and Marysville. This phenomenon represented a radical change in the lives of many members of women's juntas. Suddenly, they were transported from subservient roles in the household and limited roles in religious and philanthropic activities to taking part in political affairs. The patriarchal social system in which they lived did not allow them to vote, hold political office, or exercise authority in the male realm. However, their acceptance as members of patriotic organizations gave them a certain empowerment they never had before. When a chance to assert their opinions

33. *La Voz de Méjico*, December 15, 1863.

within the junta movement arose, they took advantage of the novel opportunity.

The first occasion for women to express their views on state-wide junta affairs occurred after a meeting of the Junta Central in San Francisco on November 10, 1863. The session of the Junta Central on that day provoked a disagreement that nearly caused a breakdown of the whole junta movement. This elite executive committee, designed to guide juntas throughout the state, voted to reorganize and remove several officers, including Manuel E. Rodríguez, its treasurer. Not all members of the Junta Central were present at the meeting, since notice of it was not published in *La Voz de Méjico* as was customary. The Junta Central immediately split into bitterly antagonistic factions over the replacement of officers. Because there was inadequate notice, the meeting was called a "clandestine" one by Antonio Mancillas, editor of *La Voz de Méjico*, and protests against the removal of Rodríguez as treasurer occupied much of the newspaper for several weeks.<sup>34</sup>

A letter from Manuel E. Rodríguez appeared in the newspaper November 24, 1863. It stated that he was unwilling to surrender his position as treasurer because his removal was a controversial action taken during an irregular meeting. Rodríguez, formerly a partner with Antonio Mancillas in operating *La Voz de Méjico*, was a high-status individual recently appointed as Mexican Consul to San Francisco, replacing José M. Mugarrieta. Ignoring the Junta Central, Rodríguez asked those in charge of the juntas throughout the state for advice: "If I should give up my office, and if so, to whom should I deliver the treasury?"<sup>35</sup>

The president of the women's junta in San José, Teresa Díaz de Casanova, sent a letter directly to the Junta Central only three days later on November 27, 1863, protesting the removal of Rodríguez. It was published in *La Voz de Méjico*, December 1, and represented the first time a women's group intervened in affairs of the male junta movement. Casanova's letter declared, "We do not recognize, nor will we ever recognize, any treasurer other than Mr. Rodríguez," thereby placing herself and the women's junta she represented at odds with the male Junta Central. Casanova challenged the authority of the

34. Ibid., November 11, 1863.

35. Ibid., November 24, 1863.



Junta Central to unilaterally appoint state-wide officers. She accused the executive committee of the Junta Central of being elitists, criticizing them for not taking the desires of the juntas across the state into account. The tone of the letter was quite strident, showing no deference whatever. It was also signed by Concepción Marmolejo, secretary, and Francisca Martín, treasurer.<sup>36</sup>

The Los Angeles women's junta chose to personally correspond with Rodríguez on his tenure as treasurer in an open letter directed to all other juntas as well. It was authored by Francisca Manzo de Cavazos for publication in *La Voz de Méjico*, where it appeared December 10. Referring to Rodríguez's request for advice on what to do, Cavazos told him, "With respect to whether you should give up the treasury or not, the answer is no!" She expressed great confidence in Rodríguez: "In the name of the junta and Mexican women of this city, I make you responsible for the money we send each month. While it is a small amount, it is sacred since it comes from the savings of the poor." The letter included a defiant message directed to the Junta Central in San Francisco: "Let the whole Junta Central be replaced, legally or illegally, here no one is treasurer but Manuel E. Rodríguez." Cavazos attempted to make her letter seem as official and formal as possible. Above her signature she placed the words "Liberty and Independence," imitating a practice of Mexican government officials.<sup>37</sup>

The women's junta in Marysville echoed the feelings of those in San José and Los Angeles. The junta's president, Laureana C. de García, wrote to Rodríguez, advising him of their support and enclosing their contributions for his remittance to Mexico. The letter, published in *La Voz de Méjico*, December 12, 1863, was quite formal and also signed by the secretary, Carlota B. de Bojorques.<sup>38</sup>

The communications sent by women in support of Rodríguez were remarkable for their time. They contained no uncertainty concerning the right of women's juntas to engage in the affairs of a movement dominated by men. Each female correspondent attempted to assert some degree of influence within a male organization. Such publication of opinions and demands by Mexican women was rare.

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36. *Ibid.*, December 1, 1863.

37. *Ibid.*, December 10, 1863.

38. *Ibid.*, December 12, 1863.

The correspondents were clearly strong women, little affected by a social system based on male superiority. Their behavior challenged the patriarchal notion of the day that women ought to remain submissive.

The controversy over whether Manuel E. Rodríguez should stay as treasurer continued into 1865. Indeed, the question of who legitimately held the office was never resolved. The post was the most important one on the Junta Central, even more significant than the presidency. The treasurer had great prestige and responsibility since he handled large sums of money for transmission to Mexico, the reason for the existence of the juntas. He developed a constituency in the hinterland where most junta members resided because he was the only official constantly in contact with organizations throughout the state. The whole junta movement revolved around the person of the treasurer.

After the publication of the first wave of letters from women's juntas supporting Rodríguez, an announcement of another junta appeared in *La Voz de Méjico*, April 5, 1864, from a surprising source. It consisted of a letter from Virginia City, Nevada, signed by forty women who had organized a new junta in the famous silver boom town about twenty miles southeast of Reno. The women, who had been following events in California by reading *La Voz de Méjico*, sent Rodríguez "our most solemn assurance of unalterable confidence."<sup>39</sup> The addition of the Virginia City women's junta meant that there were now five such organizations.

The leading women's organization, La Junta Patrióticas de Señoras de Los Ángeles, celebrated its first anniversary on July 3, 1864. It was a gala occasion at the municipal school house, which according to *La Voz de Méjico*, July 23, could barely accommodate the large number of women attending. The scene was decorated with portraits of iconic Mexican patriots surrounded by floral bunting. Henri Penelon, a local artist and photographer, took a picture of the junta before the meeting began. As a gesture of solidarity, members of the junta intended to send a copy of their group photograph to every junta in California.<sup>40</sup>

39. Ibid., April 5, 1864.

40. Ibid., July 23, 1864. Unfortunately, no surviving copy of the photo can be found.

The founder and president of the junta, Francisca Manzo de Cavazos, was the first to address the women. She advised them that their example had inspired other women's juntas in the interior of California. This fact, however, had not always met with a favorable reaction, according to Cavazos. She told the women, "Traitors and cowards say that women should not take part in the dispute between the Mexican people and the imperial government of France." Without identifying any critics of the women's juntas, Cavazos rejected them by defending the role of women:

Shame and reproach to those who believe that women should not aid or defend their country .... Throughout history, in every nation, women have been a powerful force in achieving noble deeds. Many of them, although weak, have killed tyrants. Christianity was spread through the world by the influence of women. They were an example to the men, consoled them in Roman prisons, and went to the gallows and were burned at the stake with them. A single woman, the Virgin Mary, caused whole nations to adopt the sweet doctrines of her crucified son. Woman, the incarnation of patriotism, has given fire to the passions of orators and poets. Her hand has guided those of artists like Praxiteles and Michelangelo. She has inspired genius in science and the arts, and worked for the good of humanity.

Cavazos cited the examples of women in Carthage, Rome, and Sparta who preferred to die by their own hand rather than lose their freedom. She asked, "As daughters of a free nation, should we not sacrifice everything to defend the land of Hidalgo and Zaragoza?"<sup>41</sup>

Turning to Mexicans cooperating with the French, Cavazos called attention to the case of Pelagio Labastida, Archbishop of Mexico. This ultra-conservative clergyman was the first to suggest introducing the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria as emperor of Mexico. Both after the French took Puebla and at the National Cathedral in Mexico City, Labastida gave special Masses for the commander of the invading forces, General Forey. Cavazos condemned Labastida as a traitor, comparing him to Opas, Archbishop of Toledo, who, more than a thousand years before, allowed the Moors to enter the undefended city, and whose name in Spanish was synonymous with the word traitor. She said that Labastida was the same as Opas and had given the Mexican clergy "the most shameful reputation that can be imagined." Cavazos referred to the arrival of

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41. *Ibid.*



Maximilian, claiming to be the emperor of Mexico, which took place just six weeks before her speech. She scornfully called Maximilian “a miserable instrument of Bonaparte and the clergy.” He was “an evil presence that would unleash even more war, turning Mexico into a land soaked in blood.”<sup>42</sup>

As in her speech a year before, Cavazos demonstrated that she was well informed on events in Mexico, partly a result of her literate scrutiny of newspapers. She authoritatively referred to historical figures and episodes accessible to literate women in Mexico but perhaps not so familiar to some of the women in her Los Angeles audience. One example was her reference to the role of Opas, the historic traitor. Another was her mention of the Roman women Virginia and Lucretia, martyrs whose deaths resulted in violent changes of government. Many such allusions could not have been fully understood by her audience, a large portion of whom were illiterate. For many women listening to Cavazos, her presentation of females as a positive, even ennobling force in the world must have been a revelation. Their status was greater than they realized. They had a right to act on matters that affected them. While her audience in Los Angeles had heard her message before, there were women throughout the state who had not been exposed to her ideas. *La Voz de Méjico*, by publishing her speeches, spread them to all the women’s juntas. They were probably read aloud to illiterate women. Cavazos’s references to antiquity might have been confusing, but her thoughts on the power of women were clear. To some extent, Cavazos presented early stirrings of feminist sentiments.<sup>43</sup>

The next to speak was Francisca Fernández, secretary of the junta. She began by referring to criticism directed at the women’s junta as well as at herself: “If the satire and sarcasm vomited by the traitor party was only directed at me, I would have paid no attention,” she said. “But they were aimed at the sacred and eternal principles we defend only for the reason that we are women discussing political matters in a time of crisis.” The fact that she mentioned negative comments “directed at me,” suggests that local opposition existed to the women’s junta and Fernández’s participation in it. Unfortunately, her remarks did not identify the members of

42. Ibid.

43. For a dramatic expression of such sentiments, see note 66, below.

a "traitor party" in Los Angeles, much less specify their offensive words or acts. Fernández's audience probably understood her meaning, but without more information, the antagonists of the women's junta remain anonymous.

Fernández used the example of the ancient Greeks to justify women's participation in politics. She explained that the foundation of ancient Greek society was the family. When members of the basic social unit were ignorant of politics, all of Greece was placed in jeopardy. The role of women among the Greeks was to maintain a strong base at the family level, educating children politically and enabling them to fulfill their duties as citizens. Fernández applied this concept to the women's junta: "For this reason, we women and mothers discuss political matters when our conscience and our duty oblige us to do so."<sup>44</sup>

Fernández had studied the Bible in great depth, especially the Old Testament. She made several references to obscure names from the sacred text that must have impressed the audience of mostly devout Catholic women. Fernández told them that she believed God had assigned all of humanity the task of improving the world. This divine mandate included raising politics to a higher level. She said that women, as creatures made in the image of God, had a religious duty to engage in political discourse. Fernandez accused opponents of the women's junta of abandoning Christian virtue: "Those who oppose Mexican women discussing political matters are a class of individuals who renounce their Christian mission of peace and charity."<sup>45</sup>

Several conservatives were censured by Fernández for cooperating with the French in Mexico, especially Francisco Javier Miranda, a priest who accompanied a delegation to persuade Maximilian to accept the throne of Mexico. However, she constantly returned to arguments in favor of women engaging in politics. She argued that women must be prepared to take over as head of household in the absence of their husbands. This meant that women, too, should be educated and know the ways of the world, including politics.<sup>46</sup> Her advocacy of a more elevated status for women, supported by

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44. *La Voz de Méjico*, July 23, 1864.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

historical and biblical authority, must have inspired her audience and the women who read her speech in *La Voz de Méjico*. She was an unusual example of a woman publicly resisting the era's limitations on members of her sex.<sup>47</sup>

The gold country community of Sonora, the second women's junta, soon held its first anniversary celebration. The organization's secretary, Dolores R. de Cuevas, delivered a speech on that occasion, published in the November 15, 1864, edition of *La Voz de Méjico*. She expressed her patriotic fervor, reminding the women of the situation in Mexico and "the great anguish we feel over the suffering of our brothers who are in combat against tyrants and traitors." In the isolated region of Sonora, Cuevas felt no need to defend women's involvement in politics. Unlike Los Angeles, the little mining town apparently provided the women's junta with few detractors. Nevertheless, an independent women's group required a statement about the rationale for its existence.<sup>48</sup>

Cuevas believed that the participation of women was indispensable for a successful junta movement. She thought that men could achieve very little without the intervention and cooperation of females. Men and women were natural partners, mutually dependent on one another. Cuevas told her audience that women had a far more exalted place in the world than most of them realized:

The hand of woman gives courage and enthusiasm to warriors; it imparts energy and steadiness to those who sacrifice themselves for their country. The greatness of a Corsican soldier who would later call himself Napoleon I, is owed to Josephine; Catherine I saved Peter the Great and his Russian empire from the Turks; the blood of the heroine Pola [Policarpa Salavarrieta] helped raise up the tree of liberty in Colombia, whose branches now cover the Andes. You can see that the future of Men depends on women and that they must operate together in the world. It takes woman's mysterious influence to assure success for ideas and innovations in human affairs. Let us not weaken, therefore, in maintaining the pure, constant patriotism and radiant enthusiasm you exemplify.<sup>49</sup>

47. Francisca Fernández de McDermot was born in Tortosa, Cataluña, Spain, and died in Los Angeles in 1873 at the age of forty-two. She was married in the Los Angeles Plaza Church in 1857 to William McDermot. *La Crónica*, June 7, 1873; Los Angeles County marriage book 1, 20.

48. *La Voz de Méjico*, November 15, 1864.

49. *Ibid.* The dictionaries and women's magazines mentioned in note 21 frequently presented accounts of heroic or inspiring women.



Cuevas's speech was frequently interrupted by applause. The women's response showed that they shared her rejection of male dominance. The proceedings of the Sonora anniversary celebration revealed a remarkably enlightened attitude among Mexican women, long before the emergence of organized movements toward sexual equality. Their surprisingly modern views stood in direct conflict with contemporary social convention. Admiration for the speech Cuevas made that day was not confined to California. The April 8, 1865, issue of *La Voz de Méjico* noted that it was also published by two newspapers in Mexico: *La Estrella de Occidente* in Sonora, Mexico, and *El Republicano* in Chihuahua, both in northern areas free of French control.<sup>50</sup>

The appearance of a seventh women's junta was announced in *La Voz de Méjico*, August 8, 1864. It was formed in New Almaden, a quicksilver mine nine miles south of San José operated by an American corporation. Its company town was mostly occupied by Mexicans. Word of the new women's junta was sent in a letter to the newspaper by the president of the male junta, J. E. Ochoa. It was the first time that the president of a new women's junta had not publicized its formation herself. Ochoa's letter validates a suspicion that some members of the male juntas regarded the women's organizations as subordinate to them. His letter asserted that the women's junta in New Almaden would report its future activities to the male organization. Somewhat strangely, Teresa D. de Casanova was identified as president of the New Almaden women's junta. She had earlier been a strong leader in San José and an advocate of the women's patriotic group there. At that time, she was a formidable critic of the men's junta in San José because of its inactivity, but in New Almaden she took a more submissive role.<sup>51</sup>

Los Angeles remained in the forefront of women's groups, demonstrating its leadership in a March 29, 1865, article in *La Voz de Méjico*. The newspaper announced the formation of the Club Patriótico Mejicano de Zaragoza, a mutual-benefits society formed exclusively for women in Los Angeles. It was named for General Ignacio Zaragoza, commander of the Mexican forces at the victorious first battle of Puebla, May 5, 1862. At only thirty-three years

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50. *La Voz de Méjico*, April 8, 1865.

51. *Ibid.*, August 8, 1864.

of age, Zaragoza had died of typhoid a few months after becoming Mexico's greatest hero. His memory was revered, almost deified, by Mexicans in California. The first meeting of the club named in his honor took place on March 12, 1865, at the home of Arcadia Alvarado. The correspondent to *La Voz de Méjico* wrote, "It was one of the most beautiful events I have ever seen." Chairs were placed outdoors among orange trees, facing a platform with crossed flags of Mexico and the United States. Above them was a grand portrait of General Zaragoza, surrounded by a crown of garlands. There



Patriotic women in Los Angeles met at the home of Arcadia Alvarado in 1865 to form a second organization, the Club Patriótico Mejicano de Zaragoza. The Club Zaragoza was a mutual-benefits society. Many of its members were also members of La Junta Patriótica de Señoras, including these three: Ignacia Pinto de Alvarado, Adelaida Alvarado de Lugo, and Arcadia Alvarado de Rivera. *Courtesy Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Natural History Museum.*



were images of other heroes adorned with flowers as well: Juárez, Washington, Comonfort, and Pesqueira.<sup>52</sup>

The members of La Junta Patriótica de Señoras were the core of the club.<sup>53</sup> They adopted a charter on February 26, 1865, making the Club Zaragoza a mutual-benefits society. Each member was to pay dues of two *reales*, a small amount equivalent to twenty-five cents, per month. The funds were to be used to care for the sick and bury the dead. An ill member would be called on by three others to assure medical care and provide emergency assistance like caring for children, cleaning house, cooking, and generally relieving the afflicted from domestic burdens. If there was a death, the members would accompany the deceased to a final resting place and erect a cross on it. The Club Zaragoza had an elaborate set of by-laws providing for a board of directors, officers, and operating rules.<sup>54</sup> The club was a direct outcome of the women's experience in organizing and administering their junta. Although the Club Zaragoza did not endure longer than the junta, it represented an extraordinary social experiment by Mexican women.

An incident occurred in San Francisco on March 26, 1865, that outraged the women's junta in Los Angeles. It involved the culmination of a long dispute between Francisco P. Ramírez and General Plácido Vega over leadership of the junta movement. Ramírez was famous for having established a Spanish-language newspaper in Los Angeles in 1855 called *El Clamor Público*. At the time, he was a precocious eighteen year old, a Los Angeles native regarded as a kind of home-grown genius. After *El Clamor Público* failed in December 1859, Ramírez spent two years in Sonora, Mexico, as editor of the official state newspaper there. Returning to Los Angeles in 1862, he was a founder of the male organization, La Junta Patriótica de Los Ángeles, and author of its constitution. In December 1864, Ramírez assumed the editorship of *El Nuevo Mundo*, a Spanish-language journal in San Francisco. He became one of the leading figures in the Bay

52. Ibid., March 29, 1865.

53. In June 1864 an earlier attempt to organize a mutual-benefits society for Latina women in Los Angeles had elected as its secretary Francisca Fernández de McDermot. It had apparently failed. Some of the same women formed the Club Zaragoza in February 1865. *La Voz de Méjico*, August 20, 1864.

54. Ibid., February 26, 1865.



Area's junta movement, and his newspaper competed with *La Voz de Méjico* for influence among the state's patriotic organizations.<sup>55</sup>

General Plácido Vega, designated by President Benito Juárez to carry out an official mission of recruiting men and raising funds for the war against the French, arrived in San Francisco on March 20, 1864. Vega was the local embodiment of Mexican authority. He was an army general, governor of the state of Sinaloa, and the highest ranking representative of the Mexican government in California. The majority of those in the junta movement felt that he was entitled to use their patriotic organizations to fulfill his assignment. He soon began communicating with juntas throughout the state, confidently issuing directives and orders of a seemingly official nature.<sup>56</sup>

When Vega proposed a young banker named Julio Valade as treasurer of the Junta Central, Ramírez rebelled and wrote in *El Nuevo Mundo*, February 3, 1865, that it was not reasonable for Vega "to interfere in matters purely of concern to the juntas." A series of scurrilous editorials followed in Ramírez's newspaper, each grossly insulting Vega. One item unjustifiably accused Vega of diverting money from junta funds. The motive for such reckless stories was that Ramírez himself desired to become treasurer of the Junta Central, the movement's most important officer. Ramírez saw Vega as a challenge to his leadership of the state's patriotic organizations. Vega was understandably upset by Ramírez's calumnies. After a confrontational meeting at the Club Patriótico Mexicano on March 26, 1865, Vega angrily approached Ramírez from behind and violently threw him to the pavement. The grappling men were separated by the police, with neither suffering significant injuries. The next day, Ramírez published an hysterical account of the incident entitled "Brutal Assault," blaming Vega for inflicting injury on the "defenseless editor" and trying to "gouge out his eyes."<sup>57</sup>

When members of the Los Angeles women's junta learned of the altercation between Ramírez and Vega, they called an emergency meeting to discuss the matter. The women had no hesitation in publicizing their views on a power struggle between males. Francisca Manzo de Cavazos, president, sent a letter to Ramírez published

55. Paul Bryan Gray, "Francisco P. Ramirez, A Short Biography," *California History* 84 (2007), 20–38.

56. Robert Ryal Miller, "Californians against the Emperor," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 37 (1958), 193–214.

57. *El Nuevo Mundo*, March 27, 1865.

in *El Nuevo Mundo* on April 24, 1865. The letter purported to contain detailed minutes of the women's emergency junta meeting. The women accused Vega of being the aggressor and flatly rejected his leadership of the junta movement. Six women members were identified by name and quoted at length in condemning the actions of Vega. *El Nuevo Mundo* printed their comments, presenting the women's opinions for public consideration. It was no doubt the first time in their lives that their views mattered in a public contest for power. They were Andrea Velarde, Refugio B. de Nido, Sebastiana C. de Doporto, Jesús Apodaca, Higinia Manríquez, and Juana Casillas.<sup>58</sup>

The men's junta in Los Angeles also held a meeting to protest Vega's treatment of Ramírez. *El Nuevo Mundo* published minutes of the proceeding on April 12, 1865, containing irate criticisms of Vega by men whose names were specifically set forth. The report of the meeting was quite similar to the one held by the women. The published accounts of the two meetings, male and female, reflect an unusual tolerance for intervention by women in public affairs. At this moment, members of the women's junta in Los Angeles assumed the right to speak out on civic affairs that concerned them, placing their opinions on an equal footing with those of men.<sup>59</sup>

Nor was this the only example of women's empowerment. In May 1865, twenty-one Latina women, among them Francisca Manzo de Cavazos, sent a manifesto to *El Nuevo Mundo* protesting that the Los Angeles parish church had too many seats rented by well-to-do persons, leaving insufficient room for those worshippers who could not afford to pay for a seat. Their petition to the bishop had been rebuffed. The manifesto accused the priest, his order, and the bishop of favoritism toward the rich and of profaning the name of God by money-making in his sacred temple. Eight of the signatories were members of the Junta de Señoras de Los Angeles.<sup>60</sup>

Two of the women's juntas were less assertive than the others and more in conformity with social convention. One was the New Almaden junta, which, as already seen, passively agreed to report its activities through the corresponding male junta. The other was the Virginia City women's junta, which surrendered its independence in

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58. Ibid., April 24, 1865.

59. Ibid., April 12, 1865.

60. *El Nuevo Mundo*, May 31, 1865.

a meeting reported by *El Nuevo Mundo*, February 6, 1865. The women voted to amend their by-laws so that the men's organization would determine how the funds they raised would be spent. The president, Vicenta Mendoza, told the women that the change was "in conformity with our sex," acknowledging the power of males over women's financial affairs.<sup>61</sup> The rest of the women's juntas, particularly the one in Los Angeles, made no such concessions.

On June 5, 1865, the women's junta of Los Angeles had a rare opportunity to demonstrate patriotism in a way other than sending money to Mexico. On that day, three Mexican army officers, José María Herrera, Francisco Rivera, and Modesto Medina, arrived by ship in the port of San Pedro with a sensational story that was soon verified by dumbfounded residents. The men related that they were trying to return to Mexico after having been French prisoners of war. They had been captured at the fall of Puebla, but their status as officers subjected them to being transported to prison camps in France. The men were confined there at Tours, Blois, and Bourges. After a year, they were released at the Spanish border and worked as laborers in San Sebastián to earn money for their passage home. Arriving off the coast of Mexico, they found the ports blockaded by French ships and so proceeded to Los Angeles, from where they planned to cross the Sonoran desert and rejoin the forces of President Benito Juárez in northern Mexico.<sup>62</sup>

The Mexican community in Los Angeles indulged in a frenzy of patriotism on the arrival of the three former prisoners. The president of the men's junta, Filomeno Ibarra, insisted on lodging the men in his home, and his organization raised \$306.10 for their personal needs and travel. Several individuals made gifts of horses, saddles, clothing, and rifles to the men for their difficult trip back to Mexico.<sup>63</sup>

The women of the Club Zaragoza prepared a grand reception for the officers in a beautifully decorated patio shaded by trees, on June 15, 1865. The event was fully described by the July 21 issue of *El Nuevo Mundo*, which called the affair, "a splendid one in the most exquisite good taste." The newspaper's correspondent wrote, "Large tables were so abundantly loaded with food and drink that they seemed to

61. Ibid., February 6, 1865.

62. Ibid., July 19, 1865.

63. Ibid., July 17, 1865.



bend from the weight." The club's president, Merced J. de González, offered the first of a series of elaborate toasts. She was followed by eight other women with drinks in hand, who improvised witty and poetic tributes to the officers, all of which were published in the newspaper. Afterward, each of the three men was presented with a Colt pistol that had his name engraved on it along with the words: "Club Zaragoza. Award for Merit. June 15, 1865."<sup>64</sup>

The Los Angeles women's junta held a gala event on June 24, 1865, to honor both the former prisoners of war and the organization's second anniversary. The president, Francisca Manzo de Cavazos, gave a speech much like the one a year before. Once again, she called attention to critics of the women's junta:

I have sometimes been censured and even defamed by various persons, but everything I have suffered was for the love of my country . . . . We must make some small sacrifices. For example, we must sometimes endure hearing sarcasm from a loose tongue or unpleasant comments from a halfwit . . . . Anyone not prepared to accept a little difficulty on behalf of a sacred cause has to be pathologically self-centered or an idiot.<sup>65</sup>

Cavazos failed to identify the source of negative remarks directed at her and the women's junta. By relating her unhappy experiences, Cavazos must have intended to strengthen the resolve of the women and remind them that their intervention in public affairs would not be free of problems. The rest of her short but passionate speech exhorted the members to make greater efforts on behalf of the homeland. When she concluded, the women broke into a "thunderous ovation," according to *El Nuevo Mundo*. A band played at the end of her speech, "its resounding notes joining with the applause and overflowing patriotism in every one's heart." At one dramatic moment in her speech, Cavazos had cried out, "Mexican women, rise up!"<sup>66</sup>

Cavazos's presentation was immediately followed by a blind girl who said she prayed for just one ray of light to see, if only once in her life, the Mexican flag and the image of Benito Juárez. The correspondent for *El Nuevo Mundo* wrote that her pathetic speech "would make men hardened by adversity lower their heads and cry like children." The emotional meeting ended with the women giving

64. Ibid., July 21, 1865.

65. Ibid., July 24, 1865.

66. Ibid.

the three former prisoners of war a flag they had made themselves. In the middle of it was a Mexican eagle painted in gold by Henri Penelon, the artist and photographer. The officers promised to take it into battle against the French in honor of the patriotic women of Los Angeles.<sup>67</sup>

The last meeting of the Los Angeles women's junta mentioned in the press took place January 4, 1866. It was called by Francisca Manzo de Cavazos to discuss a resolution sent to her by the Club Patriótico Mexicano in San Francisco. The issue was whether or not Benito Juárez should continue as president until the French withdrew from Mexico even though his term under the Constitution of 1857 had already expired. The Club Patriótico Mexicano, under the leadership of the new Mexican Consul, José A. Godoy, had taken over most functions of the Junta Central. An elite group, it controlled the broadly-based Junta Patriótica de San Francisco. The club unanimously approved of an indefinite extension of Juárez's presidency and sent a communication to that effect to the temporary headquarters of the liberal government in El Paso del Norte. The Los Angeles women's junta enthusiastically supported the resolution to retain Juárez in office until the French crisis had ended. The minutes of their meeting were published in *El Nuevo Mundo* on January 10, 1866, stating that the approval was made "with a joy that is impossible to describe." The meeting terminated with shouts of "Long live Benito Juárez, savior of the nation."<sup>68</sup>

About this time, early in 1866, the San Francisco press began publishing credible reports that the French intended to abandon Mexico. One factor in the French decision to leave was a concern that the United States, no longer distracted by the Civil War, would enforce the Monroe Doctrine by driving them from Mexico. Another was the ruinous expense of maintaining a large military presence in a hostile and impoverished country. Napoleon III had originally believed his venture into the New World would be a profitable one, but Mexico offered little to justify the cost of its occupation.

Among the talents of Francisco P. Ramírez, editor of *El Nuevo Mundo*, was a mastery of the French language. Throughout March 1866, translations of articles from the French press regularly appeared

67. Ibid.

68. *El Nuevo Mundo*, January 10, 1866.

in his newspaper. From this source and others, the juntas learned of a declaration by Napoleon III to his parliament on January 22, 1866, that all French troops were being ordered to depart from Mexico. This was preceded by a January 15, 1866, letter from Napoleon III to Maximilian advising him of a "gradual withdrawal" by France. At the same time, Napoleon III sent an official communiqué to his commander in Mexico City, Marshal François Achille Bazaine, ordering him to bring his troops home by the beginning of 1867.<sup>69</sup>

News of an irrevocable French retreat rapidly spread throughout Mexican communities in California. The prospect of victory for the Juárez government may have left most juntas with little incentive to continue making sacrifices on its behalf. Nevertheless, some vestiges of the junta movement continued to be active during 1866. The eighth and last women's junta was organized in Mina de Guadalupe on February 1 of that year. The tiny community was little more than a mining camp about two miles north of New Almaden in Santa Clara County. *El Nuevo Mundo* reported February 28, 1866, that the group had to seek a male to act as its secretary since "none of the ladies knew how to write." The new women's junta collected \$13.24 at its first meeting for "military operations against the invaders of Mexico," but there is no further news of this junta. The last female junta to report the collection of money was in Hornitos. The women there sent a list of contributors to *La Voz de Méjico* on September 6, 1866, showing that they had gathered the sum of eight dollars.<sup>70</sup>

The lack of news coverage of the junta movement in the late 1860s could indicate a decline or dissolution of the juntas, or it might be due to other problems the newspapers experienced at this time, or merely to an archival lacuna. The April 2, 1866, edition of *El Nuevo Mundo* reported that Antonio Mancillas, editor of *La Voz de Méjico*, had published an editorial opposing an extension of Juárez's presidency based on constitutional principles.<sup>71</sup> *El Nuevo Mundo*, April 18, contained a letter of protest against Mancillas signed by more than one hundred people.<sup>72</sup> Before the year was out, *La Voz de Méjico* went

69. Count Egon Caesar Corti, *Maximilian and Charlotte of Mexico* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1928), 2:580, 930-931.

70. *La Voz de Mejico*, September 6, 1866.

71. *El Nuevo Mundo*, April 2, 1866.

72. *Ibid.*, April 18, 1866.



out of business.<sup>73</sup> Its demise leaves the historian with fewer sources of news on the juntas. Francisco P. Ramírez sold *El Nuevo Mundo* in May 1868 to the Chilean newspaperman Felipe Fierro. *El Nuevo Mundo*'s last edition, which appeared in 1868, contained no reference to junta organizations. However, archival copies of only two issues between June 1867 and May 1868 have survived, so historians cannot know the extent of its coverage of the juntas during this period.

In Los Angeles, however, we know the male Junta Patriótica de Los Ángeles survived until 1913. It mainly devoted itself to sponsoring celebrations of Mexican Independence Day and Cinco de Mayo.<sup>74</sup> The women's organizations, La Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Los Ángeles and the Club Zaragoza, disappeared from the historical record soon after the French left Mexico. One factor in their collapse may have been the departure of two leaders: Francisca Manzo de Cavazos may have returned to Mexico, as she does not appear in the 1870 census; Francisca Fernández died in Los Angeles, but not until 1873. Teodocia Enríquez de González and her husband remained, as did the majority of the leaders of the Club Zaragoza.<sup>75</sup>

A more basic explanation for the disappearance of the separate women's juntas after 1866 can be deduced from the words of Teresa Díaz de Casanova's speech at the founding of the San José junta de señoras in 1863 and in Antonio Mancillas's subsequent editorial citing it. The male juntas were formed in response to the Mexican victory in the first battle of Puebla on Cinco de Mayo, 1862. The women's juntas were only formed after the Mexican defeat in the second battle of Puebla in May 1863. Díaz de Casanova indicated that her group, at least, appeared *as a response to* the situation caused by the fall of Puebla. She stated very plainly that Mexicans' patriotic efforts had declined dramatically in the wake of Puebla's surrender, and she intended her junta de señoras to provide some compensation for that decline—both explicitly, as a new source of funds for

73. The last issue of *La Voz de Méjico* was published December 4, 1866. Editor Antonio Mancillas disappeared from all available records at this point. As for Manuel Rodríguez, he returned to Mexico. During 1879 the San Francisco Spanish-language newspaper *La Sociedad* listed him as a Mexico City correspondent. Otherwise, there is no further record of him, either.

74. *El Nuevo Mundo*, April 18, 1866; David E. Hayes Bautista and Cynthia L. Chamberlin, "Cinco de Mayo's First Seventy-Five Years in Alta California: From Spontaneous Behavior to Sedimented Memory, 1862 to 1937," *Southern California Quarterly* 89:1 (Spring 2009), 46–54.

75. Other than references in the Spanish-language press, no record is known to exist of the residence of Francisca Manzo de Cavazos or Francisca Fernández in Los Angeles.

Juárez's government, and probably also implicitly, to shame the men into renewing their efforts and donations. Certainly that was how Mancillas interpreted her speech in his editorial, and he used his editorship of *La Voz de Méjico* to broadcast those ideas to California's Latino population. It seems to have worked.

If this theory is correct, and the women's juntas originally came into being expressly as a response to a particular crisis caused by military developments in Mexico, then once the need for military funding ended, there was no *raison d'être* for groups founded for the purpose of supplying it and shaming others into supplying it.

The women's junta movement had other effects beyond the material support it provided to the Juárez military effort. It allowed several highly articulate and intelligent women to publicly advocate a higher status for females than that approved by the prevailing patriarchal system. The leaders of the women's juntas were outspoken participants in a state-wide political movement. They carried their new activism into the formation of a mutual-benefits society and a local church equity issue. Their behavior shows that they did not accept conventional beliefs in male superiority. The Mexican women's juntas were a forum for the open expression of ideas approaching modern feminism, a phenomenon suggesting that early rejection of the era's patriarchy was greater than many realize.

# JOHN BALLARD AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN LOS ANGELES, 1850–1905

*By Patty R. Colman*

**ABSTRACT:** John Ballard, an African American pioneer from Kentucky, became a leader of Los Angeles's black community, 1850s–1870s. His story illustrates the early opportunities for black Angelenos in institution-formation, political activism, property ownership, and economic success. However, with the railroad booms of the 1870s and 1880s, Ballard and other prominent black citizens suffered a loss of social and economic status. Ballard ended up homesteading in the Santa Monica Mountains.

**Keywords:** African American Los Angeles, African American Community Formation, Black Homesteader, A.M.E. Church

## INTRODUCTION

For hundreds of years, people have come to Los Angeles seeking a better life. For men and women across the country and across oceans, Los Angeles has long been perceived as a land of opportunity. Some come for the weather, the mountains, or the beaches. Some arrive in Los Angeles with hopes and dreams of fame or fortune. In the 1850s, some came for freedom.

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As California transitioned from Mexican territory to American state, Los Angeles was itself in transition. Though California was a free state where slavery was technically prohibited, the status of many Angelenos was much more complicated and there was a wide and varied spectrum of freedom. Over the next two decades, a small number of African Americans labored to solidify their free status and build a successful community for themselves and their children. When opportunities for African Americans constricted as the city's population grew and changed, they adapted, adjusted, or started all over. One African American pioneer, John Ballard, exemplifies these experiences. His story sheds light on a little-known chapter of black enterprise in Los Angeles history.

After fleeing Kentucky as a young man, Ballard settled in Los Angeles in the 1850s. He raised a family, owned property, co-founded a church, and became a pillar of the African American community. This early community has often been overlooked by historians, but this article will explore their accomplishments while highlighting this individual. John Ballard demonstrated the resourcefulness and activism that existed among the men and women of black Los Angeles during the 1850s–1870s. As this article will show, this little-known community deserves to be recognized and studied further.

Many historians have written about the African American experience in the West, California, and Los Angeles. Historians prefer to focus on the black community in northern California because the nineteenth-century black population in the north was larger and seemingly more successful than in southern California. While it is true that L.A.'s black population was smaller and less affluent, this is not a reflection on the individuals who settled in southern California or any lack of effort on their part. This is actually a reflection of the regional differences that existed at the time. The state's first African American newspapers, churches, and benevolent societies were in northern California, but this is, arguably, a factor of the disparity in the economic, social, and political resources between San Francisco and Los Angeles as a whole in the mid-nineteenth century.

While a few historians have written exclusively about Los Angeles, most focus on the years after Reconstruction, the coming of the railroad, and the land boom of the 1880s when the population of Los Angeles County tripled. Many historians treat this as the beginning of a true African American presence in Los Angeles. On the other hand, the few historians who do focus on Los Angeles

before 1880 tend to shine the spotlight on a few luminaries, such as Biddy Mason and Robert Owens. While there is no doubt of their significance, more individuals and experiences need to be examined.<sup>1</sup>

As California transitioned from Mexican territory to American state, Los Angeles offered African Americans the potential to achieve financial and social success. At the time, the country was consumed with the national debate over slavery: its morality, constitutionality, and future. Politicians spent much of the decade crafting compromises for or against state's rights, slavery, or free soil. Abolitionists murdered southerners. Southerners murdered abolitionists. Political parties fractured, realigned, or collapsed altogether. In Illinois in 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglass debated one of the most contentious issues of the day: the extension of slavery into new territory. During these debates, both men affirmed the superiority of their own race, flatly rejecting the equality of blacks and whites. By no means were African Americans in Los Angeles immune to these social and political realities, but in spite of them, they found ways to achieve a level of prosperity that was unattainable in many parts of the country and would arguably become unattainable again in Los Angeles by the turn of the century. One African American man may have exaggerated a bit in 1851 when he claimed that "California is the best country in the world to make money. It is also the best place for black folks on the globe."<sup>2</sup> For John Ballard and others, California did indeed offer a better life.

#### AFRICAN AMERICANS AND CALIFORNIA STATEHOOD

The history of blacks in Spanish and Mexican California has been well documented. Mulatto soldiers came to California as part of the Portolá and De Anza expeditions and approximately half of the forty-four *pobladores* were of at least partial African descent. In 1793,

1. For one of the best works on the Los Angeles African American community, see Lonnie G. Bunch, *Black Angelenos: The Afro-American in Los Angeles 1850–1950* (California Afro-American Museum, 1988). Mr. Bunch is the founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. For an excellent study of African Americans in Los Angeles into the turn of the 20th century, see Douglas Flammig, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
2. William Loren Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 116.

the population of El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Ángeles counted fifty-nine Spaniards, fifty-seven mulattoes, seventeen mestizos, and fifteen Indios. Spain did have a rigid class system, but in the frontier lands of California, racial classifications and restrictions were blurred. Paul Robinson explains that in California, "Africans and Indians who became Christian were considered part of the 'gente de razon' or 'people of reason,' thus elevating their social standing."<sup>3</sup> Because of a social climate that allowed for greater social mobility, several mixed-race citizens rose to prominent positions, perhaps none more famously than the Pico family.<sup>4</sup> Blacks and mulattoes were generally able to be absorbed into Californio society and "race, under Spain and Mexico, was never the insurmountable barrier it was in the United States."<sup>5</sup> This changed after the Mexican-American War and the acquisition of California in 1848, when American attitudes and values prevailed.

During the California constitutional convention of 1849, a major point of discussion centered on the question of slavery. While it was decided that California would become a free state, the "problem" of "negroes" and their status in the new state persisted for some lawmakers. For weeks, convention delegates such as Henry A. Teft and M. M. McCarver (the latter from Kentucky) argued that free blacks should not be allowed to enter the state.<sup>6</sup> Although this ultimately did not pass, other racial prohibitions demonstrated the prevailing attitudes of many Californians. According to the first state constitution, suffrage was granted only to "white male citizens," and in 1850 the California legislature passed a law denying people of color the right to testify against whites in court.<sup>7</sup> This was not unusual for the time; blacks were not considered citizens of the United States and did not enjoy equal rights.

It was in this social climate that the first African Americans made California their home. Many (if not most) were brought to the state

3. Paul Robinson, "Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles," in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, ed. Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramon (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 22.

4. Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 78–86.

5. De Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, 89.

6. Rudolph Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 128–129.

7. James A. Fisher, "Struggle for Negro Testimony in California 1851–1863," *Southern California Quarterly* 51 (December 1969): 313.



against their will.<sup>8</sup> According to the Compromise of 1850, California entered the Union as a free state (but not without much debate in Congress), and the state's constitution opened with the declaration that "all men are by nature free and independent, and have certain inalienable rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty." Article I, Section 18, declares that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of a crime, shall ever be tolerated in this state."<sup>9</sup> However, slave owners already living in California at the time of ratification were permitted to retain their property. In addition, numerous slave owners actually entered the state with their slaves after ratification. Estimates about how many slaves lived in California during the 1850s vary from a few hundred to one thousand, but there is ample evidence to prove that slavery was an open secret. Advertisements for the sale of slaves appeared in California newspapers, and even the 1852 state census lists "slave" for the occupation of several black individuals.<sup>10</sup> The California legislature signaled its support of slave owners by passing the Fugitive Slave Law of California in 1852, prohibiting slaves from running away from their owners while in the state.<sup>11</sup>

While many came as slaves, other African Americans came to California of their own free will, no doubt enticed by the same dream of prosperity that attracted other immigrants. Quintard Taylor estimates that more than half of California's African Americans in the early 1850s came for the gold rush and ultimately settled in gold country. Yet a few trickled down south and into Los Angeles, which

8. As discussed earlier, there were people of African ancestry in California since the 18th century. However, I do not wish to describe them as African American, since their culture and society was not American. I consider those black men and women in California after 1850 to be the first African Americans because they lived under American laws, attitudes, and racial restrictions. Quintard Taylor, in *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African-Americans in the American West 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), argues that most African Americans were ex-slaves brought to California by U.S. military officers during the Mexican American War.

9. *Constitution of the State of California*, 1849. Accessed February 10, 2012, at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/1849/full-text.htm>.

10. Since slavery was technically prohibited in California, there was not a separate slave schedule as in other states, nor was there a column on the pages to denote a slave. However, some enumerators chose to mark an individual as a slave. For example, see Sampson and Clem on page 2 of Santa Clara County 1852 census.

11. The law was only in effect until 1855. See Robinson, "Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles," 30. There are a few cases that involve the status of slaves in California. Probably the most famous and extensively covered case is that of Archie (Archy) Lee, whose case reached the state supreme court. *C.A. Stovall vs. Archie (Lee), a Slave* (1858).

in the 1850s had the “only significant black population in southern California.”<sup>12</sup> At this time, the black population in Los Angeles was comprised of a mixture of people, free and slave, with a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

### BLACK LOS ANGELES IN THE 1850S

Travelers to Los Angeles during the 1850s (and beyond) frequently commented on the city’s lack of sophistication. With its propensity for violence and lynching and its disproportionately large number of gambling halls and saloons, it seemed to be a rough frontier town. The city of Los Angeles in 1850 had a total population of 1,610. In comparison, San Francisco stood at 34,870.<sup>13</sup> Anglo-American travelers described Los Angeles as “semi-gringo” and still a “Mexican town,” no doubt due to its large Spanish-speaking and Indian populations, and most commentary about the non-Anglo citizens of Los Angeles centered on these two groups. Perhaps because of their small number, black Angelenos did not receive as much attention in published accounts. In 1850, there were 464 African Americans in San Francisco, while the entire black population of Los Angeles County stood at about twelve.<sup>14</sup> Also contributing to their perceived “invisibility,” as J. Max Bond theorized, is the fact that most of them, “if not actually indentured, were at least living in the homes of white people.”<sup>15</sup> The most notable exception to this is Peter Biggs. After being freed by his owner in Missouri, he settled in Los Angeles sometime before 1850 and opened the city’s first barbershop. He is the only African American not enumerated with a white family and not listed as a “laborer” in the census of that year. None of the others have last names, and nine out of the twelve were born in slave-owning states.<sup>16</sup>

12. Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 90.

13. *Statistics of the United States, Seventh Census: 1850 Statistical View, Compendium*, Washington 1854. For more on the “character” of Los Angeles in the 1850s, see Leonard Pitt, *Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish Speaking Californians, 1846–1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) and William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

14. The census identified only 12 as Negroes. Californios, whether or not they had African ancestors, were counted as white.

15. J. Max Bond, “The Negro in Los Angeles” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1936), 10.

16. United States Census, Los Angeles County, 1850.

Historians such as Edward Castillo have written about the enslavement (or servitude) of California Indians. The 1850 Act for the Government and Protection of Indians governed little and protected not all. Even in Los Angeles this was an unfortunate reality, and Horace Bell described the situation as a "slave mart." But little is known about the black slaves who were also here. Besides the documented twelve individuals, there were other African Americans in Los Angeles County who were not represented in the census. For example, an African American man named Henry was charged in 1850 with assaulting another man, "George, a negro." The court record describes the defendant as "Henry, the negro servant of Gen. Morehead."<sup>17</sup> Thompson and West's *History of Los Angeles County, California* recounts an incident from 1850 in which two slaves were beaten and shot by their owners for asserting their freedom. Arkansas native and slave owner James R. Holman filed a deed of manumission with the Los Angeles District Court in 1850, promising to free his slave Clampa after two years of "faithful service" and her sons once they reach the age of twenty-one.<sup>18</sup> These individuals were not reported in the census. Certainly, enumerators made mistakes, and census records are not perfect. However, there may be another explanation. In the 1920s, famed director Cecil B. DeMille was filming near the San Fernando Mission. As the story goes, he discovered an original copy of the 1850 census just as it was about to be incinerated in a pile of trash. Eventually the census was handed over to the Southwest Museum and in 1929 it was published. The book's forward recounts the above story and notes that there actually was a second census schedule for slaves and slave owners. But after the report was submitted to the Department of the Interior, this schedule was destroyed and not included in the final draft. It is possible that this schedule was thrown out because it was simply blank; since California was a free state there was no need for Schedule II. On the other hand, it could have reported the details of slaves and slave owners in Los Angeles.<sup>19</sup>

17. The criminal case can be found at the Seaver Center, Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, Collection 1164: *Alcalde / LA County Court Records, 1850-1852*, Box 1. "Gen Morehead" may be the J.C. Morehead who served in the state militia and participated in the 1850 attack on the Indians of Gila River.

18. Reproduction of Thompson and West's *History of Los Angeles County, California* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1959), 90. The record of Clampa's manumission is also covered in Thompson and West, but the original can be found at the Seaver Center, in the *Minutes of Proceedings in the District Court, 1850-1851*.

19. See the dissertation by Albert Lucian Lewis, "Los Angeles in the Civil War Decades, 1850-1868,"



By 1852, the black population of Los Angeles County grew to approximately forty, due in large part to the Mormon settlement in San Bernardino. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah decided to establish a settlement in southern California. In 1851, a caravan arrived, and the leaders purchased thousands of acres from the Lugo family in what is now San Bernardino. Among this group were at least twenty slaves who came with their Mormon owners. Most of the settlers returned to Utah by the end of the decade, but several of their slaves remained. The most famous member of this group was Biddy Mason, a woman owned by Robert M. Smith but emancipated through a court case in Los Angeles. Before and after the trial, Mason received assistance from the Owens family and other free blacks. Upon her emancipation, Mason and her daughters chose to move to Los Angeles and join the burgeoning African American community in the city. She was invited to live in the home of Robert Owens, a prominent African American in Los Angeles. Her daughter Ellen went on to marry his son Charles.<sup>20</sup> The other San Bernardino slaves were eventually freed as well, and like Mason, some chose to move to Los Angeles, while some of the ex-slaves chose to stay and live in San Bernardino.<sup>21</sup>

The black population of Los Angeles in the 1850s was therefore a mixture of slave and free. Some were obviously still living in a form of bondage, some were born free, some had recently been manumitted, some had purchased their freedom, and perhaps others had run away from their owners. In the 1852 state census, most were classified as either laborers or servants. But, by the end of the decade, this would change drastically as more black settlers came to Los Angeles, intent on living and working independently.

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(University of Southern California, 1970) and M.H. & M.R. Newmark, *Census of the City and County of Los Angeles, California for the Year 1850* (Los Angeles: The Times-Mirror Press, 1929). The publication suggests that Schedule II was in fact blank and that is why it was thrown out by the Department of the Interior. Then again, why would the enumerator have bothered carrying around a second schedule—let alone submit it—in a “free” state?

20. Biddy Mason, her daughters, and several other slaves were freed by Judge Benjamin Hayes in 1856. There are many excellent works about Biddy Mason. For example, see Dolores Hayden, “Biddy Mason’s Los Angeles, 1856–1891,” *California History* 68, no. 3 (Fall 1989).

21. For more on the Mormon settlement, see Edward Leo Lyman, *San Bernardino: The Rise and Fall of a California Community* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996).

## JOHN BALLARD: FROM KENTUCKY TO LOS ANGELES

In 1936, U.S.C. doctoral candidate J. Max Bond completed a sociology dissertation entitled "The Negro in Los Angeles." To learn about Los Angeles in the "old days" Bond conducted interviews with descendants of the Owens and Mason families, some of the city's most prominent black families. But he also interviewed "William Ballard, one of the few remaining 'old timers' and a native of California." William Ballard was John Ballard's fourth child, born in 1862. In the 1933 interview, William stated, "In 1848, at the age of seventeen, my father came to Los Angeles."<sup>22</sup> Throughout his life here, John Ballard consistently listed Kentucky as his place of birth, in about the year 1831. White acquaintances who knew him later in life described him as an ex-slave. Rancher and neighbor J.H. Russell wrote, "He came to California very early in his life and had been [a] slave in his younger days. It never occurred to me until now to wonder just how he came to California. I never knew whether he came as a slave or after the slaves were freed."<sup>23</sup> Given the demographics of Kentucky during the antebellum period, it is statistically most likely that he was born into slavery. In 1830, about the time of Ballard's birth, there were 165,213 slaves in Kentucky. This represented 24 percent of the entire state population. While there was a free black population at the time, it was extremely small and represented only about .07 percent of the entire state population. By 1850, the number of slaves in Kentucky had risen to 210,981 with a free black population of about 1 percent of the entire state population.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the 1850s slavery became even more profitable, and as the nation rumbled closer toward civil war, Kentucky slave owners desperately clung to their property.

The movements of slaves and free African Americans were tightly controlled in Kentucky. Gangs known as "patrollers" rode through towns and back country roads looking for fugitives. Cities often imposed "colored curfews" to restrict their black inhabitants. In Louisville, for example, the curfew was 10:00 p.m. and was signaled by the ringing of the Presbyterian church bells each night. African Americans found by patrollers after curfew could receive up

22. Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles," 23.

23. J.H. Russell, *Heads and Tails...and Odds and Ends* (Los Angeles: Thomas Litho and Printing Company, 1963), 18.

24. Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, volume I* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 108.

to thirty lashes or worse. Not only was a physical beating possible, but free people constantly lived under the threat of being captured and sold into slavery if they were not in possession of the correct papers.<sup>25</sup> Most dreaded of all was being captured, turned over to a slave dealer (the most notorious were located in Lexington) and then sold and sent into the Deep South. It was therefore imperative that African Americans carry their papers at all times, either identifying them as a free person or having their owner's permission to travel. Given this situation, how did a young African American man get out of Kentucky (and slavery) and to Los Angeles?

Generally, there were three ways a slave could achieve freedom in Kentucky during the 1840s or 1850s: through a will, an act of manumission by an owner, or running away. The 1792 Kentucky constitution stipulated that owners who manumitted their slaves had to guarantee (usually through a bond) that the slaves "would not become a charge to the county in which they resided." This was later expanded to include *any* county in Kentucky. After 1823 the slaves themselves had to appear in court so that a physical description could be recorded, and after 1852 manumissions depended on the slave leaving the state. The amended state constitution of 1850 also declared that no "negro" could immigrate into Kentucky.<sup>26</sup> One wonders why anyone would want to.

While the state provided the opportunity for emancipation, it appears that a relatively small number were actually freed in this way. In 1850 a total of 152 slaves were manumitted in all of Kentucky, less than 1 percent of the number of slaves held in bondage. The numbers rose only slightly throughout the rest of the decade. According to Kenneth M. Stampp, in 1859 "Kentucky, with a slave population of nearly a quarter million, freed only 176."<sup>27</sup> Clearly manumission was not a popular or frequent action for Kentucky slave owners.

25. Clayton E. Jewett and John O. Allen, *Slavery in the South: A State-by-State History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 108. One poignant example of the importance of freed papers can be found in Jessamine County Order Book K, 24–25. In 1854 a free African American couple brought their toddler and infant daughters, Mary Jane and Sarah Elizabeth, into the court to receive certificates proving their free born status. No doubt this must have been extremely important to parents fearful for their children's future and safety.

26. Edward M. Post, "Kentucky Law Concerning Emancipation or Freedom of Slaves," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (1985): 345.

27. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 235. It also appears to the author, based on certainly incomplete research, that it was more likely that a slave would be freed if he or she was mulatto. Several freedom papers discovered in Kentucky



Some slaves chose not to hold out hope of being freed by their owner and made the decision to run away. Historian Lowell H. Harrison has calculated that "the slave most likely to escape was a man between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five" and that more "skilled workers escaped than unskilled."<sup>28</sup> These demographics fit Ballard, as he was no older than twenty-seven when he arrived in Los Angeles and was literate. Kentucky slave owners in 1850 reported (or probably underreported) ninety-six fugitives, a figure second only to Maryland. As Marion B. Lucas has argued, with 700 miles bordering free soil, the states of Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, running away seemed to be the best option for acquiring freedom" for Kentucky slaves.<sup>29</sup> But just because free territory was close did not make it easy, nor guarantee success, and the fact is that the vast majority of slaves never attempted an escape. The most precarious part of the journey was the outset, moving through Kentucky and crossing the Ohio River, and typically slaves were completely on their own during this stage of their journey, traveling only at night and going days without food. State laws placed harsh penalties on anyone who assisted or even persuaded a slave to flee.<sup>30</sup> If a slave made it through Kentucky, then the Ohio River posed another enormous obstacle. Not only were the logistics of crossing the river difficult, but patrollers constantly roamed its banks looking for fugitives. Countless men and women, after stepping foot on free soil for only a moment, were captured and sent back into slavery. Some tried to flee again, some were severely punished, and some never got another chance.

The Underground Railroad has been well documented, and thousands of slaves received assistance from its "conductors." But Marion B. Lucas argues that most runaway slaves had never heard of such a thing and received no formal assistance at all. The Kentucky Fugitive Slave Data Base also supports the theory that most runaways had no assistance. Instead, as J. Winston Coleman wrote, most slaves who fled from Kentucky simply knew of the

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archives describe the person as "copper" or "yellow." One emancipated boy was described as "a light mulatto straight hair blue eyes."

28. Lowell H. Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 86.

29. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 61.

30. *Ibid.*, 66.

North Star and "that by following it [they] would reach the land of freedom."<sup>31</sup> This land of freedom more often than not was Ohio, Michigan, or Canada. Communities in cities such as Cincinnati and Detroit became havens for fugitives. Obviously, slave owners did everything they could to disrupt this. In 1821 Kentucky formally requested that Congress negotiate with Great Britain on the issue of fugitive slaves living freely in Canada. After being pressed by Kentucky lawmakers, neighboring Ohio passed a fugitive law in 1839. Even with such laws, more slaves escaped through Ohio than any other state.<sup>32</sup>

Documenting an individual slave's experience in the historical record is extremely difficult. No manumission record or will granting freedom has been found for John Ballard. It is possible that he was brought to California in bondage, although a connection to an owner in California has not been found. It is certainly a possibility that he ran away, although most slaves journeyed to northern states or Canada, not to the Far West. Without much money, if any at all, slaves needed to get to the closest possible free territory and usually could not set out for an expensive, long, dangerous, and very visible trek across the overland trails. Although we can never know for sure, it is at least possible that for John Ballard that North Star may have pointed him west.

#### THE BUILDING OF A BLACK COMMUNITY

Although William Ballard stated that his father arrived in Los Angeles in 1848, the first record of his presence in California appears in 1859 when he married a woman named Amanda. The record filed with the county clerk states "I, Jesse Hamilton a Methodist minister hereby certify that the ceremony of marriage was performed by me on the 6th day of November 1859 between John Ballard, a colored man aged 30 years born in Kentucky[,] and Amanda, a colored woman aged 19 years born in Texas."<sup>33</sup> Amanda's identity remains a mystery, although the fact that she came from Texas and does not

31. J. Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 219. Also see Lucas and J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002).

32. Coleman, 219 and in notes on 223 and 237.

33. Los Angeles County Marriages, Volume I, 43.

have a surname suggests that she had been a slave.<sup>34</sup> The minister, Jesse Hamilton, was born in Tennessee in about 1828. He must have arrived in Los Angeles no earlier than 1859, since later that year, within four months, he performed four marriages, all of African American couples. Two couples, Henry Hall and Martha Owens, and Lewis (sometimes spelled Louis) Green and Maria Yancey, were married on the same day: September 22, 1859.<sup>35</sup> The Ballards followed in November, and William Leonard and Anna Howard (both from Baltimore) were married on December 12. Was this just a case of love being in the air? It's possible but more likely that the couples were already together but could not or would not make the marriage legal until an African American minister was in town to perform the ceremony. This is supported by the fact that the eldest Ballard child, Dora, was born in California in 1857 (two years before her parents' legal marriage ceremony took place). It is also notable that there were two African American marriages recorded with the county earlier than 1859, but both of these were presided over by a justice of the peace.<sup>36</sup>

The Reverend Jesse Hamilton therefore made an important addition to Los Angeles and the black community. Although Protestant congregations in Los Angeles date from as early as 1850, African Americans may not have felt welcome.<sup>37</sup> Those who were not Catholic would have had few options if they wished to be married in a church. Hamilton's arrival signaled an important moment for the community; marriages were not only legal, but celebrated in the manner they wished. While they did not yet have a physical church, marriages were probably celebrated in the homes of friends and neighbors, promoting a sense of community and identity that was their own. For a growing a population, this was an important milestone.

34. Finding a slave in the historical record is difficult; finding a female slave even harder. There were a surprising number of Texans who settled in Los Angeles County as this time, especially in El Monte.

35. Green's name appears in the historical record variously as Lewis and Louis.

36. Los Angeles County Marriages, Volume I. One of the first marriages recorded in the county is that of Sarah Thompson, a "woman of color," and Daniel Pewitt, a "man of color," in 1852. Their record is found in Volume I, 2.

37. Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 322.



Between 1850 and 1860, the number of blacks living in Los Angeles increased from twelve to sixty, and these men and women became established in town.<sup>38</sup> For example, John Ballard worked as a teamster while Amanda stayed at home, which was probably on First Street. They now had two children, Dora (3) and Julia (1) and a twenty-five-year-old Indian laborer named Juan José living with them. This may strike some readers as surprising, but many families in Los Angeles used Indians as household servants or laborers at this time, and the Ballards were not the only black family to do so. This fact may suggest a unique racial and cultural situation. As noted earlier, African Americans were not considered full citizens in California, yet in 1860 they worked for wages, owned businesses and property, and employed Indian workers in their homes. While African Americans by no means enjoyed elite social status, they seem to have held a higher social position than Indians.<sup>39</sup>

Just next door to the Ballard home was Oscar Smith, a thirty-five-year-old black laborer from the South. A few houses away lived four African American families, including the minister Jesse Hamilton and the well-known Robert Owens and his wife, Winnie. Owens was born a slave in Texas and, after purchasing freedom for himself and his family, settled in Los Angeles and made an excellent living as a cattle dealer and stable owner. He was generally understood to be the richest African American in Los Angeles. Next door to the Owens lived Louis Green, a barber, and his wife, Maria. (They had also been married by Hamilton in 1859.)

An examination of housing patterns supports Paul Robinson's assertion that at this time blacks were not yet living in black-only neighborhoods. While several families lived near each other, they also had white neighbors. Peter Biggs lived next door to one of the wealthiest white men in southern California: Rancho Los Cerritos owner John Temple. The Ballards' next-door neighbor was an Irishwoman, while the Pepper family lived next to wealthy white merchant Peter Mellus. William Ballard explained in his 1933 interview that "there were no special districts then, as there are now."<sup>40</sup> And contrary to popular belief, Los Angeles' "Negro Alley" was not

38. United States Census, 1860.

39. For more on the history of California Indians in the nineteenth century, see Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

40. Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles," 24.

a segregated neighborhood for African Americans. The racial segregation at this time applied to others groups, especially the Chinese, not to the black inhabitants of the city.

In contrast to the earlier state census of 1852, the 1860 federal census identified seven cooks, five barbers, and various porters, farmers, and laundrymen as African American. None of the women were listed as having occupations, although no doubt they worked extremely hard cooking, cleaning, tending to gardens, and producing household goods. Biddy Mason was not listed as having a profession, but historians know that she served as a valued midwife and nurse who provided services to black and non-black inhabitants of Los Angeles. Thus, it is quite possible that several of these women did indeed participate in a trade, but for various reasons (sexism, racism, ignorance) these were not noted in the census.<sup>41</sup>

An event from 1862 serves as an example of the community's evolution and demonstrates members' reliance on one another for assistance and support. Louis Green, the successful barber, accepted a six-year-old mulatto boy named Henry Smith as an apprentice. According to the legal record, Henry, with the consent of his mother, Hannah Smiley,

has voluntarily and of his own free will and accord put and bound himself apprentice to Lewis G. Green of the same County and State to learn the art, trade and mystery of a Barber; and as an apprentice to serve from this date, for and during and until the said Henry Smith shall have attained the age of eighteen (18) years which will be on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of January AD 1874 during all which time the said apprentice shall serve his master faithfully, honestly, and industriously...<sup>42</sup>

In addition to teaching Henry the "mystery of a barber," Green also promised to send his apprentice to school for three months out of the year and provide him with food and clothing. Robert Owens added testimony at the end of the record stating (under oath) that young Henry was the son of Robert Smith, who "deserted his child and has never provided for him since the time of his birth." This is indeed the Mormon pioneer Robert Smith who settled in San Bernardino and who, at one time, owned Biddy Mason. As

41. United States Census, 1860. For more information about Biddy Mason and midwives in general, see Dolores Hayden, "Biddy Mason's Los Angeles 1856-1891," *California History* 68, no. 3 (Fall 1989).

42. The apprentice contract can be found at the Seaver Center, *Los Angeles County Miscellaneous Records*, 1859-1870, April 7, 1862.

discussed earlier in this article, she and twelve other slaves were freed in a Los Angeles court. Among these slaves were Hannah and her children, including an unnamed two-week-old infant boy who was born in California. Given his friendship with Biddy Mason and his son's marriage to her daughter, Robert Owens no doubt had intimate knowledge of the Robert Smith household and its secrets.<sup>43</sup>

During the 1860s, the African Americans of Los Angeles continued to make great strides. State and national laws prevented them from enjoying equality, but there was a small window of opportunity that many took advantage of. Ironically, this took place during the Civil War years. Even though most of the battles and fighting took place far from California, the Civil War was very much at the forefront of Los Angeles politics. California remained loyal to the Union, but this by no means reflected unanimity of sentiment among the state's inhabitants. Los Angeles was notoriously home to southern sympathizers and pro-secessionists. For years, agricultural barons in southern California looked longingly at slave states and envied their pool of labor, considering blacks to be better and more productive workers than Indians.<sup>44</sup> During the debate over statehood in 1850 some southerners attempted to establish a "colony" of slaves and slave owners in the state. This sentiment never fully evaporated and even led to a vote in 1859 that nearly resulted in the secession of southern California from the rest of the state. In the 1860 presidential election, Lincoln received fewer votes than his Democratic opponents in Los Angeles County. Several Angelenos volunteered and fought for the Confederacy, while others stayed home and participated in their own pro-Confederate organizations. The Bella Union Hotel hung a huge painting of General Beauregard.<sup>45</sup> In this climate, it could not have been easy for African Americans to assert themselves, but they continued to find success, and no one exemplifies this more than John Ballard.

According to 1863 county tax assessment records, Ballard paid \$2.48 in taxes for horses kept on the Puente Ranch in El Monte. For an African American at this time, owning property was a

43. Ibid.

44. Helen B. Walter, "Confederates in Southern California," *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (March 1953): 44.

45. Pitt, *Decline of the Californios*, 233; Walter, "Confederates in Southern California," 41–55.



significant achievement, and the county official who recorded the information made a special notation, writing "Workman's John" and "F.M. of C." Beneath that is apparently the word "free" and then simply, "John Ballard." The initials stand for "free male of color," which was a typical way to describe a freed slave. In fact, all of the African Americans recorded in this tax assessment book have "F. M of C." next to their name. But for some reason, Ballard is the only one with the additional description and relation to a white man, La Puente Rancho owner William Workman.<sup>46</sup> What is also unclear is the relationship between the two men. William Ballard, in his 1933 oral history, stated that his father briefly lived in El Monte "to raise hogs."<sup>47</sup>

In 1864 John Ballard found even more financial success, as he and another man are listed with "improvements located on 50 acres of land lying in El Monte," which consisted of horses, a corral, furniture, farm equipment, six oxen and a wagon. The tax paid on this property was \$8.89.<sup>48</sup> On December 17, 1866, Ballard and Franklin (this time listed as "negroes" in the assessment book) paid \$26.34 in taxes on even more property.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the 1860s Ballard paid more and more taxes on more and more property. He also continued to have financial dealings with some of the city's most prominent citizens. In 1868 he purchased property from O.W. Childs, a co-founder of the Farmers and Merchants Bank and the University of Southern California. A few years later he sold that property to Elizabeth Ellis, wife of county supervisor Asa Ellis.<sup>50</sup> Even though he was singled out as a "colored man" in the deeds, his race obviously did not prevent him from engaging in financial transactions with citizens from the upper class.

46. The record for "Workman's John" can be found at the Seaver Center, *Subsequent Assessment Book Fiscal Year March 1, 1863, Los Angeles County*. The records for the other African American men are listed in the *Assessment Roll Fiscal Year March 1, 1863, Los Angeles County*.

47. Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles," 23.

48. It should be pointed out that El Monte was known as an especially strong pro-southern community, with many settlers coming from southern states, especially Texas. Several Confederate organizations, vigilante groups, and secessionist plots were said to have been organized in El Monte.

49. Tax records can be found at the Seaver Center, *Assessment Book 1864, Los Angeles County* and *Original Assessment Roll March 1, 1866, Los Angeles County*. This Franklin is probably the same man as in 1864. His identity is not known for sure, although there is an African American named Marshall Franklin living in Los Angeles in 1870 and Benjamin Franklin and family in El Monte in 1880.

50. Deed, Los Angeles County, February 12, 1868, and May 29, 1871.

## THE FIRST A. M. E. CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES

Financial success in the 1860s helped John Ballard and others take an important step in community building. It was time for their own church. All historical examinations of African Americans in the West, California, and Los Angeles highlight Biddy Mason as the matriarch of the first black church in Los Angeles. As described earlier in this article, Mason was freed in a Los Angeles court room in 1856. She went on to serve as a midwife and philanthropist. Her care for the needy and success as an entrepreneur is still legendary in this city, and rightly so. But it is her role in establishing the First African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) that remains her most lasting legacy. She was one of a number of individuals who worked together to found the first black church in Los Angeles.

The genesis for the church may reach back all the way to 1854 when Robert Owens opened his home for religious activities. Biddy Mason no doubt joined these gatherings, as she was a houseguest, friend, and future in-law of the Owens family. The consensus among historians is that it was Mason who took the next step and formally founded the First A.M.E. Church in Los Angeles in 1872. But a deed filed with the county three years *earlier* suggests that there were others who also deserve credit. On March 13, 1869, John Ballard, Jeremiah M. Redding, Charles Owens, Louis Green, George Smith, John Hall, and Samuel Johns "which are the Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" purchased "Lot One (1) in Block 'L' of the Mott Tract from Dr. Joseph Kurtz for \$75."<sup>51</sup>

The seven men referred to as the trustees include some of the most prominent members of the black community. Like John Ballard, most of them, if not wealthy, were financially secure. Charles Owens, the son of Robert Owens (who died in 1865), was the wealthiest of the group. But others, such as John Hall, demonstrate the entrepreneurial skills and increasing prominence of the African American community. Born in Missouri about 1840, Hall came to Los Angeles sometime before 1860 and "went into the express wagon business...establishing an express line between Los Angeles and Santa

51. Deed, Los Angeles County, March 13, 1869. The trustees of the church later sold this property and purchased land described in a deed dated November 30, 1885 as "Lot Number Twenty-five (25) in Block One (1) in the Bennet Tract." The trustees of this church are listed as William Conner, Robert Owens, William Ballard, Biddy Mason, and G. Huddleston.

Monica.”<sup>52</sup> Not only did he own a business, he lived next door to Dr. Joseph Kurtz, a leading physician and the man who sold the property for the church. Louis Green was a barber in town who had a shop in the famed Pico Building and in 1870 owned property worth \$1,000. Most of the church’s trustees had lived in the city for at least a decade and had obviously become community leaders.

After they purchased the property from Dr. Kurtz, the trustees constructed the church. Thompson and West’s *History of Los Angeles County, California* states that the African Methodist Episcopal church “was organized and a house erected on the corner of Fourth and Charity streets, in 1869, and dedicated by Bishop T. M. D. Ward.”<sup>53</sup> Charity Street was later renamed Grand, and an examination of an 1884 city map places Lot 1 of Block L directly on the corner of Fourth and Grand.<sup>54</sup> Thompson and West list Winnie Owens (Robert Owens’s widow and mother of Charles), Biddy Mason, and Alice Coleman as the first members of the church. With these prominent men and women in the congregation by 1870, the church had already become a focal point for the community, serving as a spiritual and cultural center for African American Los Angeles. As Delilah Beasley stated in *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, “All the movements for the uplift of the Negro race during pioneer days in California were strongly supported by all the ministers of the A.M.E. Church.”<sup>55</sup> The church wasn’t just a house of worship; it was a community center and symbol of success.

### ACTIVISM AND CELEBRATION

In 1865, the Civil War finally ended and Congress ratified the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which ended slavery in the United States. Los Angeles African Americans must have been joyous, given that so many of them had at one time been slaves themselves.

52. Kenneth G. Goode, *California’s Black Pioneers: A Brief Historical Survey* (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1973), 97.

53. Thompson and West, *History of Los Angeles County, California*, 120; Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1919), 163. According to Beasley, Bishop Ward was born in Pennsylvania in 1823. He was elected Bishop in 1868 and then came to California for four years. He was instrumental in the promotion of the A.M.E. church in this state, and participated in other civil rights activities, such as the Emancipation Proclamation celebration.

54. Thompson and West, *History of Los Angeles County, California*, 120. See *Map of the City of Los Angeles, California, 1884* by H.J. Stevenson, accessed February 10, 2012 at <http://digital.lapl.org/ItemDetails.aspx?id=6423&pp=2>. Ward was the pastor at the Bethel A.M.E. church in Sacramento.

55. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 158.



Shortly thereafter, the Fourteenth Amendment was proposed, which, among other things, granted citizenship to all people born in the United States. Unlike the Thirteenth Amendment, which the California legislature endorsed, the Fourteenth did not fare so well in Sacramento. It died in committee and was not voted on. Enough other states did pass it, however, so that the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified to the Constitution on July 9, 1868.<sup>56</sup> African Americans were now citizens of the United States, but they still did not enjoy full civil rights. Republicans in Congress pushed for one more amendment that would guarantee and protect freedmen's right to vote.

The Fifteenth Amendment states that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."<sup>57</sup> When the amendment was brought before the California Legislature, it faced fierce opposition. On January 28, 1870, California rejected the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>58</sup> Again, however, enough states did support the measure so that the amendment was ratified to the Constitution on February 3, 1870. African American communities across the country, including Los Angeles, rejoiced and organized celebrations.<sup>59</sup>

On April 12, 1870, approximately fifty people gathered on the recently purchased A.M.E. property to celebrate ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. This date (and the early start time of 4:00 a.m.) was selected to commemorate the start of the Civil War and the firing on Fort Sumter back in 1861. In addition to the ceremony, the *Los Angeles Star* reported that "on Tuesday evening the colored people of this city gave a ball and supper, on which occasion they invited a large number of white citizens to join in their festivities, many of whom accepted the invitation, and mingled with them in the mazes of the giddy waltzes."<sup>60</sup> Although a list of attendees does not exist, newspaper accounts confirm a few who were there.

56. California did formally ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1959.

57. United States Constitution, Amendment 15, Section 1.

58. California did not formally ratify the amendment until 1962. The author would like to thank Ralph E. Shaffer and Sheila M. Skjeie for sharing their work, *California and the Coming of the Fifteenth Amendment*. Much of the information included here draws on their excellent book, which can be accessed online at <http://opac.library.csupomona.edu/articles/1594992.10207/1.PD>.

59. As it turned out, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment did not protect suffrage rights as completely as its supporters had hoped. Full voting rights would not come until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

60. *Los Angeles Star*, April 16, 1870.

Newspapers credited Winnie Owens with providing the food, but, given the large crowd, she likely had assistance. A well-known white politician singled out his "friend" Oscar Smith during his speech. But perhaps the most significant of the attendees was Rev. J.E.M. Gilliard, who not only spoke at the ratification ball but also gave a lecture just four days later at the courthouse. The *Star* reported that

Prof. Gilliard delivered a lecture in the Court House, "on the future of the colored race," for the purpose of raising funds in aid of the building of a church for the colored people. The house was crowded, and from the frequent applause with which the lecturer was greeted, it was evident he gave great satisfaction. The portion of the lecture which we heard, was highly creditable to the speaker, and it was delivered in a most effective manner.<sup>61</sup>

Gilliard's participation is important for several reasons. Although not much is known about his early life, the *African American National Biography* describes him as a teacher, minister, and frequent contributor to the San Francisco *Elevator*, one of California's first African American newspapers. Although he lived in northern California, during the early 1870s Gilliard traveled extensively throughout the state delivering lectures on racial issues. He was apparently a gifted orator and gained an outstanding reputation among blacks and whites.<sup>62</sup> His participation in the celebration therefore suggests a level of organization and activism in Los Angeles that has never been acknowledged. Gilliard must have been invited to the festivities by leaders of the Los Angeles black community. His presence also suggests that African Americans in Los Angeles were in contact with communities in other parts of the state and had been for a long time.

In 1855 black leaders in northern California had organized a convention at the Colored Methodist church in Sacramento. Although there were many issues to discuss at the three-day convention, "its most important objective was the reform of the testimony laws" that prevented blacks from testifying in court against whites. J. D. Gilliard and T. M. D. Ward (who would dedicate the Los Angeles

61. Ibid.

62. Eric Gardner, "Gilliard, James E. M." *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *Oxford African American Studies Center*, accessed February 14, 2012 at <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/pr/t0001/e2731>. Gilliard eventually left California for a position in Texas. He continued his work as a public speaker and activist. Unfortunately, he was assassinated in 1876.

A.M.E. church in 1869) attended the convention, and it was Gilliard who introduced Resolution No. 15: "Resolved that this Convention appoints persons in each County, to circulate petitions, and procure signatures to the same, for memorializing the Legislature for the repeal of the law which excludes testimony of colored people in courts of justice, in an action or proceeding to which a white person is a party." The convention then appointed delegates to collect signatures "in the counties in which they reside." Thomas Rix was appointed for Los Angeles County.<sup>63</sup> The petitions were presented to the state legislature, which took no action on the matter.

A second Colored Convention was held the next year, December 9–12, 1856, and again the testimony laws were a focus. The *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California* declared, "The object we seek, equal testimony in the courts of this state, is deserving of our most earnest effort." The delegates ordered another petition drive, and again Thomas J. Ricks (Rix) was appointed to facilitate the drive in Los Angeles County.<sup>64</sup>

Clearly, the Los Angeles black community had long participated in statewide civil rights activities. The petition drives, the dedication of the A.M.E. Church by Bishop Ward, the elaborate ratification celebration, and the presence of Reverend Gilliard bear the markers of organized efforts and a statewide network. Owens, Ballard, Green, Hamilton, and others must have been responsible for the commemoration of the Fifteenth Amendment. These same people were also involved in the next great civil rights event in Los Angeles history.

#### FIGHT FOR SUFFRAGE

With the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, it appeared that black men would now be able to vote in California. After the celebrations ended, they must have been dismayed when it became clear that politicians at the state and local level had no intention of allowing that to happen. On April 16, 1870, the same day that Reverend Gilliard is reported to have delivered his address at the courthouse,

63. *Proceedings of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California* (Sacramento: Democratic State Journal Press, 1855), 16.

64. *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California* (San Francisco: J.H. Uddel and W. Randall Printers, 1856), 5.



Lewis Green attempted to register to vote in Los Angeles County. County Clerk Thomas D. Mott refused his request.<sup>65</sup>

As discussed in several parts of this article, Lewis Green was an integral member of the black community. He surely participated in the ratification celebration and attended Gilliard's lecture. The timing of Green's attempt to register cannot be a coincidence. Nor is it likely that he made the decision to register solely on his own. A more likely scenario was that it was planned, and Green was chosen and agreed to be the first to make the attempt. The Associated Press even reported that local blacks were preparing a "general move" for registration, suggesting collective action.<sup>66</sup> As noted in the earlier section, it's also possible that blacks in Los Angeles were working with outside organizations. A tantalizing clue to this connection may be Lewis Green himself, which may explain why he was selected. Beasley explained that it was sometimes difficult for news to travel up and down the state, so there developed a sort of "underground railroad" of communication: "The Negro members of the executive committee formed a secret code and transmitted their news by the way of the barber's chair...This method was most successful in transmitting news all over the State."<sup>67</sup> Lewis Green was a barber.

It is unknown if Green anticipated the County Clerk's refusal to add his name to the Great Register. But historians do have extensive documentation that shows state and local authorities were either confused or simply unwilling to comply with the Fifteenth Amendment. Some argued the same "states' rights" position that had been used during the secession debates: that a federal amendment does not overrule a state constitution. But as Ralph Shaffer and Sheila Skjeie explain, "Faced, on the one hand, with what seemed to be a national government mandate for black registration in the form of the Fifteenth Amendment, and on the other with a state attorney general and state constitution solidly supporting a 'whites only' voter policy, the clerks followed different paths."<sup>68</sup> In Los Angeles, Mott took the position that the amendment still needed state-level enabling legislation before it could go into effect. Upon being turned

65. *Los Angeles Bulletin*, April 16, 1870.

66. See Shaffer and Skjeie, *California and the Coming of the Fifteenth Amendment*.

67. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 188.

68. See Shaffer and Skjeie, *California and the Coming of the Fifteenth Amendment*.

away, Green took yet another courageous step (again, one that was probably decided by the group): he took the matter to court.

Green hired Robert M. Widney to represent him. Widney had only recently settled in Los Angeles and was a young attorney, but he later went on to become a major figure in Los Angeles, serving as a judge and cofounder of the University of Southern California, among other ventures. Widney and Green filed a writ of mandamus on April 23, 1870, to compel Mott to register him. *Louis G. Green vs. T.D. Mott, County Clerk* was decided on April 28 by Judge Ignacio Sepulveda. He questioned whether the amendment by itself was enough "to warrant the Clerk to register the names of colored men, which the State Constitution does not allow." He conceded that, while "the right to vote cannot be denied to colored men, the qualifications necessary for the Clerks to register the individuals of that class, are not in any manner prescribed."<sup>69</sup> Therefore, as the *Los Angeles Star* reported:

The following decision was rendered in the case of L.G. Green, an American citizen of African descent, vs. T.D. Mott, County Clerk of Los Angeles, on a writ of mandamus, to show cause why he refused to register said L.G. Green on the great register of Los Angeles county. After hearing the arguments of counsels, the Court decided that the 2<sup>nd</sup> section of the Fifteenth Amendment requires special legislation to carry the first article into effect, and the writ of mandamus was therefore denied.<sup>70</sup>

Before Green and Widney could make their next legal move, Congress passed "An Act to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution" which imposed fines and other penalties on anyone who obstructed a person from voting. So, on June 21, 1870, County Clerk Mott registered Lewis Green, entering his name into the Los Angeles Great Register. Two other men registered the same day as Green, followed by several others over the next few weeks and months. This collective response suggests that Green did not act alone, but on behalf of the entire community. While it was his name on the court record, others must have provided support and solidarity throughout the entire process. On July 5, 1870, John Ballard, William Brown, and Charles Owens registered to vote. In the Great

69. *Los Angeles Star*, May 7, 1870. Judge Sepulveda's decision was published by the *Star*. The Huntington Library has the minutes of the case in *Minutes of County Court, County of Los Angeles*, #6, Vol. 6 but not the full decision.

70. *Los Angeles Star*, April 30, 1870.

Register, Ballard is listed as a 40-year-old farmer from Kentucky who was naturalized "from the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment to US Constitution."<sup>71</sup> Finally, these men were able to exercise the most fundamental privilege and right of a citizen of the United States of America.

This victory must have been extremely satisfying for the growing black community. In 1870, the black population now stood at just over 100 people. This growth reflects both new immigrants and new family members. The Ballard family, now living on the corner of Seventh and Hope Streets, included seven children, ranging in age from 16 to 1: Dora, Julia, John, Willie, Henry, Freddie, and Alice. With this large brood to take care of, it was a good thing that he was one of the wealthiest African Americans in Los Angeles.<sup>72</sup> As mentioned above, the family moved briefly to El Monte, but soon moved back to the city. In 1933 William Ballard explained that the family returned to Los Angeles because his father "wanted us to get an education." This suggests that there was some formal institution that was only available in the city. William described this experience: "I attended a Negro school taught by Ed Thompson, who had a Mexican wife and two children. The school was located on First Street between Los Angeles and Main Streets, in the front room of Mr. Thompson's house. There were sixteen boys in the school. The girls were taught in some other house."<sup>73</sup>

During the 1870s, the Los Angeles black community had much to celebrate and be proud of: they had established a church, had won the right to vote (at least the men), and were able to educate their children. Several of them owned property throughout the city. Louis Green lived on Flower between Seventh and Eighth Streets. George Smith lived on Fort Street, and Robert Owens owned a large property at 67 Alameda Street.<sup>74</sup> But it would be naive to believe that the success enjoyed by the African American community during the past few decades was universally accepted. One sign suggesting otherwise was a notice posted in the city on June 17, 1871, warning a

71. *Great Register of Los Angeles County 1866-1872*.

72. United States Census, 1870. Ballard is listed as owning \$1,000 in real estate and an additional \$1,000 in personal property.

73. Bond, "The Negro in Los Angeles," 23. It is also possible that the First A.M.E. on 4th and Grand was used as a schoolhouse. According to Evelyn De Wolfe, the church was rented by the Los Angeles Board of Education as the first public school for black children in the city. *Los Angeles Times*, "Negro Church a Landmark," January 15, 1971.

74. *The First Los Angeles City and County Directory, 1872* (Los Angeles: W. Ritchie Press, 1863).



certain citizen to leave the city within twenty-four hours. The notice was accompanied "with the usual skull and cross-bones" of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>75</sup>

The 1870s and 1880s introduced enormous changes in the city and in the circumstances of citizens like John Ballard. During the 1870s decade, personal tragedies and public challenges forced him to move on from his position as a community leader in Los Angeles and start a new life in the Santa Monica Mountains. In May 1871 Amanda Ballard, age 34, passed away due to complications related to childbirth. She was buried in the "old city cemetery."<sup>76</sup> Sadly, as there is no record of an additional Ballard child, it appears that the pregnancy resulted in two deaths. John Ballard was now a widow and single father of seven children. In the nineteenth century, childbirth was dangerous, and women constantly risked their lives to create another. It's quite possible that Biddy Mason treated Amanda Ballard and even was present for her death. In any event, we can only assume that John Ballard leaned on his friends and colleagues to help him and his children get through such a difficult time.

We cannot know how this personal tragedy and its aftermath affected him emotionally, but over the next few years other events complicated his life even more. In 1871 John Ballard purchased property from Asa Ellis, the County Supervisor, in downtown Los Angeles for "one thousand dollars gold coin." This was a significant amount of money at the time, and it is unclear if the property was for an investment or for his family's use. In the deed, the property is described as "commencing two hundred seventy four yards east of a large sycamore tree known as a line tree between Temple and Ellis." It continues with a lengthy description and estimates that the property consists of "twenty acres more or less."<sup>77</sup> Just two years later, in the depths of a nationwide depression, Ballard turned around and sold the exact same property to John G. Downey, the wealthy banker, co-founder of USC, and ex-governor of California. However, while the "twenty acres more or less" is the exact property he purchased from Ellis for \$1,000, Ballard sold

75. Thompson and West, *History of Los Angeles County, California*, 101.

76. This cemetery is sometimes referred to as the city cemetery or Fort Moore Hill Cemetery. The cemetery was shut down in 1880. Many of the bodies were removed to other local cemeteries.

77. Deed, Los Angeles County, May 9th, 1871.

the property to Downey for just \$200, a considerable loss.<sup>78</sup> This transaction marks a change in circumstance for Ballard, a personal economic downturn.

Starting in 1863, Ballard had consistently paid taxes on land and other possessions in Los Angeles County. Throughout the 1860s the amount of his taxable property increased. Yet, starting about 1871, this trend reversed, and after 1875 there is no record of him in the assessment books. Although Ballard was still a resident (and voter) of Los Angeles, after 1875 his property holdings dwindled; a measure of his reversal in fortune. But in the midst of this, Ballard did have at least one happy moment. In 1879, eight years after Amanda died, he married Francis Brigs, a thirty-five-year-old widow from Arkansas.<sup>79</sup>

These changes were significant, but it wasn't just Ballard who experienced change. Many of his friends from the "old days" either left the city or passed away. Oscar Smith, Ballard's onetime next-door neighbor, died in 1872. John Hall moved his family out of town; the minister Jesse Hamilton resettled in northern California; and Lewis Green moved to Santa Monica. In a telling shift, the once successful barber was now working as a janitor. And three of the Ballard children, Dora, William, and John, now worked for white families as gardeners and house servants. Unfortunately, this was not unusual and was part of a national trend. John Ballard, after more than two decades, moved his family far away from the city and into the Santa Monica Mountains.

### MOVING ON

The 1870s was the beginning of rapid growth for southern California. Arguably the most significant event in this transition was the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1876, followed by the Santa Fe in the next decade. A mass of newcomers poured into the region, lured by the promise of excellent weather, abundant land, lush citrus groves, and a climate that was conducive to curing just about any

78. Deed, Los Angeles County, April 30, 1871. The circumstances surrounding the transaction are further complicated because it appears the property was not solely for Downey. He is listed in the deed as the guardian of William Cardwell.

79. Los Angeles County Marriages, Book 6, 123. In both the marriage records and the 1880 census, her name, Francis, is spelled with an i.

health problem. This was followed by the spectacular land boom of the 1880s. Over the next few years, plans were made for a deep-water harbor, imported water, streetcars, and all the infrastructure needed to create a true metropolis. Leonard Pitt explains that

The boom of the eighties contributed vastly to the ongoing process of "Americanization" ... The population of Los Angeles jumped 500 percent, automatically transforming the electorate into an Anglo-American one. The mores changed equally radically. The type of consumer goods advertised for sale, the tastes in food and dress, the prevalence of English over Spanish in daily and official conversation, the Gilded Age recreations, and the style of commerce—all changed rapidly and irreversibly.<sup>80</sup>

It wasn't just food and fashion that were introduced. Many of the new immigrants brought with them their perceptions and attitudes towards race. Jim Crow traditions had become entrenched in other parts of the United States. As southerners, easterners, and midwesterners traveled west, so too did racist attitudes. These migrants changed Los Angeles and it was no longer the city it had been in the 1850s, 1860s, and early 1870s. The promise that had brought John Ballard's generation of black Angelenos was no longer so certain. Perhaps this is why John Ballard and others found themselves adjusting to new realities or leaving the city they had called home.

#### MOVE TO THE MOUNTAINS

Triunfo Creek meanders peacefully through the Santa Monica Mountains in what is today Westlake Village and Agoura Hills, south of the 101 freeway. In February 1880 John Ballard purchased 160 acres of land near the creek for \$50 from Antonio Castro and moved his family out to the mountains. Ballard must have been looking for seclusion, as in 1880 this was isolated and far from any sizeable settlement. It took several days to journey from Los Angeles to Triunfo Canyon. For a family that was used to the hustle and bustle of the city, this must have been quite a change, but perhaps a change they hoped would be for the better.

Though beautiful and private, living in the Santa Monica Mountains at this time was not an easy task; in 1880 it was a frontier. The Ballards were probably among the first, if not *the* first, African

80. Pitt, *Decline of the Californios*, 274.



Americans to settle in the western Santa Monica Mountains. Based on the 1880 census, there were few people of color in all of the San Fernando Township. Out of the 1,215 people enumerated in the census, seven were black, all of them Ballards.<sup>81</sup>

Any pioneer family living in this environment had to be self-reliant, and as the Ballard children grew up and moved out, most of the labor fell to John and Francis. To supplement what they could provide for themselves, Ballard periodically journeyed into Ventura or Los Angeles to sell wood and charcoal; by all accounts, the family lived in very humble circumstances. Somehow, Ballard had lost the wealth he had worked so hard to earn. His former status as a community leader in Los Angeles seems to have been forgotten, as he was mentioned in several *Los Angeles Times* articles merely as “an old colored man.” Another Ventura County resident had a more elaborate description:

He was a big powerful man... A reach of arms about equal to his height, square shoulders, and a full, heavy, beard—probably his face had never been touched by a razor. And I am telling you, he was a black man! He had a very kind face and soft voice with a southern drawl. I saw him once with an ox and a mule hitched together pulling a wagon, that, a good part of which, was made at home. A sapling for a wagon tongue and a hitching gear of the same. The harness was patched up with ropes and wire. The wagon had a bow and cover. He was with his wife and had half a dozen children...they would peer out—darky style—and it was equal to a circus. People would cheer and jeer and joke but the old Negro would never crack a smile...<sup>82</sup>

The Ballards became well acquainted with the Russells, owners of the ranch that became the basis for Westlake Village. J.H. Russell wrote that Mrs. Ballard sometimes came to help his mother when the Russell children were sick. When the boys rode out toward the Ballard cabin, “she would always make biscuits and she had wild grapes preserved in honey. Perhaps because we were young and hungry, I have always thought I’ve never eaten anything so good.”<sup>83</sup> Russell and

81. United States Census, 1880. The San Fernando Township covered a large territory in 1880, including much of the San Fernando and Conejo Valleys. I had a difficult time finding the Ballards in this census. When I searched by name, nothing came up. This is because their name appears to have been recorded as “Bullard” by the census taker.

82. Wendell P. Daily, *An Album of Memories* (Santa Barbara: The Schauer Printing Press, 1946), 162.

83. Russell, *Heads and Tails...and Odds and Ends*, 19.



*John Ballard in the Santa Monica Mountains near the end of his life.  
Courtesy, Russell Family.*



other neighbors also described John Ballard as a powerful man who liked to sing and hear his voice echo throughout the canyon.

By the 1890s all of the Ballard children had moved away, except for Alice (the youngest) and perhaps a few grandchildren who lived with them as well. Unfortunately, Ballard became a widower again in 1896. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "Mrs. John Ballard, wife of a colored man whose rickety wagon drawn by a quintette [sic] of old horses is a familiar object on the streets had died yesterday morning in her cabin, fifteen miles from Calabasas."<sup>84</sup> It was about this time that another neighbor recounted a particularly poignant story to Frederick H. Rindge, owner of the Rancho Malibu. In his 1898 reminiscence, Rindge recounted the story told to him by "an old mountaineer." Although the book does not identify him by name, it most certainly involved Ballard:

He brought to mind how his old colored neighbor across the range had been maltreated by the settlers, on account of his color; how they set fire to his cabin, hoping thus to terrorize him and to drive him from the country; how some thought the real purpose was that some men with white faces and black hearts wanted to jump his claim after they had got rid of him. But this was not the material the good old gentleman was constructed of, and, as a shame to his tormentors, he put up a sign over the ruins of his cabin which read; "This was the work of the Devil."<sup>85</sup>

Further evidence of Ballard's fortitude was the fact that although Ballard lived a considerable distance from Los Angeles, he continued to vote, a testament to the gravity he attributed to this right. In the 1896 Great Register, he is identified as a sixty-seven-year-old farmer, five feet, seven and a half inches tall. His complexion is "dark," his eyes "black" and his hair "gray." He also had "one joint off third finger left hand."<sup>86</sup>

### THE HOMESTEAD

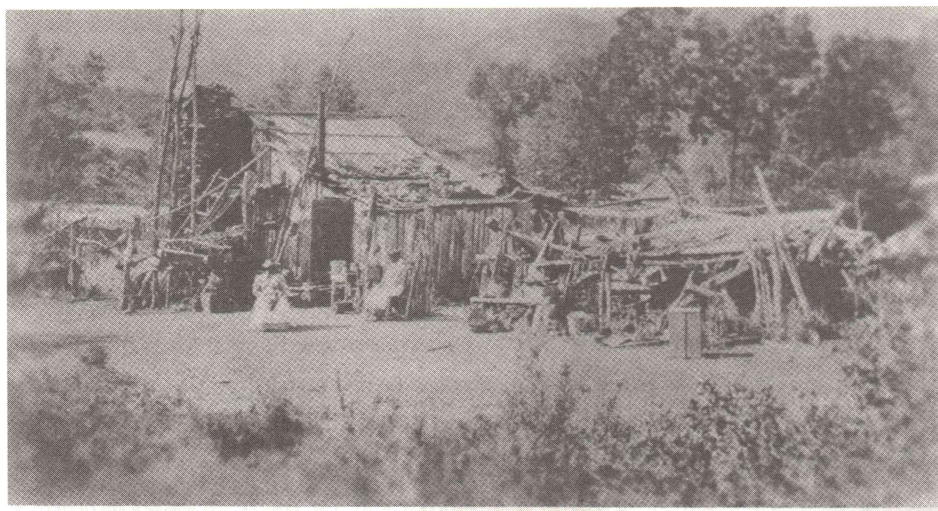
By 1900 enough people had moved into the San Fernando and Conejo valleys to require multiple post offices and separate townships for

84. *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1896.

85. Frederick Hastings Rindge, *Happy Days in Southern California* (Cambridge, MA and Los Angeles, CA: [1898]), 136–137. This must be the fire that the *Ventura Free Press* reported on August 7, 1891. According to this account, the Ballards were away from their home, only to return and discover that they had lost everything.

86. *Los Angeles County Great Register*, 1896.





Ballard Homestead Cabin, undated. *Courtesy, Russell Family.*

the census. In 1900 the Ballards were enumerated in the newly created Calabasas Township, along with 130 other families. Out of 488 people, seven are listed as something other than “white”: one Chinese, two Indians, and the Ballards. In the column for race, the Ballards are noted with a simple “N.” Along with John and his daughter Alice, two grandsons are included in the household, Lyman (7) and George (2).<sup>87</sup> It was in this year, 1900, that John and Alice Ballard each acquired a homestead patent.

Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law in 1862. It was designed to encourage western settlement by providing up to 160 acres of land for a very small fee. An applicant had to be a United States citizen, file the required paperwork, live on the land for at least five years, and make improvements, building a dwelling and raising crops. Once that was complete, an applicant appeared in the local Land Office to offer proof through sworn testimony and corroborating witnesses. John and Alice’s four witnesses included his son and her brother Henry Ballard, José Rocha, Filipe [sic] Botillier, and Tadeo Botillier. John’s property included 144 acres near what is now Seminole Hot Springs, while Alice acquired 160 acres of land

87. United States Census, 1900.

adjoining her father's to the southwest.<sup>88</sup> Ballard's homestead file includes the usual signed forms and notices, but it must have given him special satisfaction to swear that "I am by birth a citizen of the United States." Both Alice and John's testimony provide further insight into their experience in the mountains:

HOMESTEAD PROOF: TESTIMONY OF CLAIMANT

Ques. 1—What is your name, age, and post office address?

*John Ballard, age 70 years. P.O. Box Newbury Park, Cal.*

Ques. 2—Are you a native born citizen of the United States, and if so, in what State or Territory were you born?

*I am. I was born in Kentucky.*

Ques. 4—When was your house built on the land and when did you establish actual residence therein? (Describe said house and other improvements which you have placed on the land, giving total value thereof.)

*In February, 1880. I established actual residence thereon in February, 1880. Lumber house 16x16 feet, kitchen 16x16 feet, value \$100. Barn, value \$150, chicken houses, \$20, 2 corn cribs, \$20, well, value \$10. Fencing, \$200, small orchard & vineyard, \$50. Total value \$550.*

Ques. 5—Of whom does your family consist; and have you and your family resided continuously on the land since first establishing residence thereon? (If unmarried, state the fact.)

*No wife, grown children. My children do not live with me. I have.*

88. This property is the same as—or at least very close to—the property Ballard purchased in 1880 from Antonio Castro. He may not have realized in 1880 that the property was public land, or that Castro did not in fact own title to the land. This may explain why he waited twenty years to file for the patent. This actually occurred fairly frequently as land records and claims were sometimes unclear and confusing. It is also possible that, after the burning of his cabin, Ballard may have felt a homestead was a necessary protection.

Ques. 6—For what period or periods have you been absent from the homestead since making the settlement, and for what purpose; and if temporarily absent, did your family reside upon and cultivate the land during such absence?

*Absent on business 2 to 5 times a year for 4 or 5 days at a time. No other absence.*

Ques. 7—How much of the land have you cultivated each season, and for how many seasons have you raised crops thereon?

*About 15 acres. 20 seasons.*

#### HOMESTEAD PROOF: TESTIMONY OF CLAIMANT

Ques. 1—What is your name, age, and post office address?

*Alice Ballard, age 30 years. P.O. Box Newbury Park, Cal.*

Ques. 2—Are you a native born citizen of the United States, and if so, in what State or Territory were you born?

*I am. I was born in California.*

Ques. 4—When was your house built on the land and when did you establish actual residence therein? (Describe said house and other improvements which you have placed on the land, giving total value thereof.)

*About 12 years ago. I established actual residence about 12 years ago. Log house of 1 room, value \$50, fencing, value \$150. Land cleared, value \$40, fruit trees and vines, value \$50. Total \$290.*

Ques. 5—Of whom does your family consist; and have you and your family resided continuously on



the land since first establishing residence thereon?

(If unmarried, state the fact.)

*I am single. I have.*<sup>89</sup>

Ques. 6—For what period or periods have you been absent from the homestead since making the settlement, and for what purpose; and if temporarily absent, did your family reside upon and cultivate the land during such absence?

*Occasional absences for a day or two at a time, on business. Seldom absent at all.*

Ques. 7—How much of the land have you cultivated each season, and for how many seasons have you raised crops thereon?

*About 10 or 15 acres. 10 to 12 seasons.*

Surprisingly, just one year after receiving her patent, Alice Ballard married and moved out of the mountains, taking John's two grandsons with her. In 1901, John Ballard was alone on his homestead. Conejo Valley resident J. H. Russell recalled that towards the end of his life Ballard was poor and did not have much to eat. On his last visit Ballard told him, "When I die, I want to be buried right here on the little hill."<sup>90</sup> But that was not to be. After a lengthy stay in the Los Angeles county hospital, John Ballard passed away and was buried at Rosedale Cemetery on September 23, 1905. It was a long way from his hill, but perhaps equally fitting. From his burial site, there is an unobstructed panoramic view of downtown Los Angeles.

### CONCLUSION

John Ballard's life in southern California illustrates the region's opportunities in the 1850s–1870s for African American settlers:

89. The 1900 census has two grandsons of John Ballard living in his household. Whether these were Alice's or one of her sibling's is unknown. To complicate matters, the 1910 census lists three children living with Alice and her husband: Fred, Theodore, and Mary. But Alice reported to the census-taker that she had five children, so two were not living in the household.

90. Russell, *Heads and Tails . . . and Odds and Ends*, 21.

freedom from slavery, community formation, economic opportunity, and the pursuit of political equality. In the economic climate and railroad boom of the 1870s, and amid the huge population influx of the 1880s, the African American minority found its circumstances constrained, its possibilities reduced. Some adjusted to lower socioeconomic positions; others, like the Ballards, moved on and started over somewhere else. Neither their achievements nor their perseverance should be forgotten.

### POSTSCRIPT

After 1905 the memory of the Ballard family and their presence in the mountains lived on. For decades, locals associated the highest peak in the area with Ballard, if in degrading terms. A *Los Angeles Times* article from 1909 described a deer hunt in the mountains. The



Plaque dedicated in 2010 near the site of the Ballard homestead marking the renaming of the hill to Ballard Mountain, to honor "a courageous African American community leader and pioneering homesteader," John Ballard.

*Author's photo.*

party "went up the Malibu road, five miles from Calabasas, and then started 'cross country up the hills. They passed over Nigger Ballard Hill."<sup>91</sup> The *Sunday Morning Outlook* in 1928 simply referred to it as "Nigger Hill." Even government maps listed the mountain as "Niggerhead" until it was changed to "Negrohead" in the 1960s. The mountain was obviously associated with Ballard, but over time his name and therefore his identity were forgotten.

In recent years, controversies have arisen all across the United States involving such place names. While every situation is different, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, led by Zev Yaroslavsky, and the United States Geographical Survey agreed that, in this case, the name needed to be changed. Exactly one hundred and thirty years after they settled on the land, the mountain was officially renamed Ballard Mountain.

As it turns out, this is not the only Ballard legacy left behind. Apparently, the penchant for activism is an inherited trait. John Ballard's grandson Claudius graduated from the University of California, Berkeley medical school in 1913. He practiced medicine in Los Angeles for four years before volunteering to serve in World War I. As a First Lieutenant in the Medical Reserve Corp, he won the Croix de Guerre award. In a letter written from France, he said, "I hope our efforts and sacrifices will mean something to our country and my race."<sup>92</sup> Dr. Ballard's son, Reginald, also inherited the family trait. During World War II, he trained with the famed Tuskegee Airmen, then later, as a Los Angeles firefighter, challenged the department's segregation policies. Today, his uniform hangs proudly in the African American Firefighters Museum in Los Angeles.

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91. *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1909.

92. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 248.



# HOLDING THE CENTER: IMAGES OF URBANITY ON TELEVISION IN LOS ANGELES, 1950–1970

By Michan Andrew Connor

**ABSTRACT:** Early television shows that focused on Los Angeles as subject, such as *The City at Night* (KTLA) and Jack Linkletter's *On the Go* (CBS), assured white, middle-class, suburban viewers that they had a place in the larger metropolis by presenting a selective knowledge of its features and issues. *On the Go* surpassed the entertainment level of *The City at Night* to address some serious social issues. By the mid-sixties, suburbanization had been fully embraced as the "good life." Shows such as *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* (KNXT), instead of engaging suburban viewers in metropolitan issues, entertained them with glimpses of the city's "oddities." The change in tone marked the passing of the center of cultural identity from the central city to the suburbs.

**Keywords:** Television 1950–1970, Suburban Culture, Los Angeles Local Media

I'm young and want to find out things. I think all people feel that way.  
Some of the places we visit help satisfy their curiosity.

—Jack Linkletter, host of *On the Go* (CBS), 1959<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ron Tepper, "Interest for Housewife: Jack Linkletter Aims for the Curious," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1959.

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Greater Los Angeles, like most American metropolitan areas, changed dramatically in the post-World War II era. Suburbanization redistributed population, wealth, and property value and introduced new spatial arrangements for racial and class segregation. The city of Los Angeles grew from more than 1,070,000 residents in 1950 to nearly 2,500,000 in 1960. The parts of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistical Area outside of the city limits, however, grew far faster, increasing in population from nearly 2,400,000 to more than 4,300,000. Where the city of Los Angeles had accounted for 45 percent of the region's population in 1950, it accounted for only 36 percent in 1960. The suburbanization of the region was, if anything, more drastic than these figures suggest, because 80 percent of the city's demographic growth took place in the suburban-style tracts of the San Fernando Valley, politically part of the city, but culturally more suburban, while populations in older city neighborhoods south of downtown absolutely declined.<sup>2</sup> This spatial transformation was accompanied by a deep cultural change; local culture mirrored a national shift in which the dominant mode of American identity became suburban.<sup>3</sup> Since these changes unfolded alongside the rise of television as the nation's primary mass medium, many historians have sought to understand whether mass culture followed, mediated, or even drove the suburbanization of American metropolitan areas. Los Angeles presents an important case through which to evaluate this issue, because many Angelenos' careers were devoted to creating television content, where they drew on their experiences as metropolitan residents to produce what sociologist Darnell Hunt terms "collective representations" of the region. These media images offered residents of the metropolitan area some selective knowledge of the region as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the ideas that Angelenos held about urban and suburban space were closely linked to the programming that appeared on the region's growing number of television screens. Close attention to the content of that programming

2. Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports CENSR-4 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 37, A-6; Los Angeles City Planning Commission, *Accomplishments, 1960* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Planning Commission, 1960), 31.
3. Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
4. Darnell M. Hunt, "Representing 'Los Angeles': Media, Space, and Place," in *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory*, ed. Michael J. Dear and J. Dallas Dishman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 321-323.

demands revision of established historical interpretations of the relationship between mass culture's content, the practices of consuming mass culture, and the sociospatial changes of suburbanization.

Eric Avila has been the most influential cultural historian to argue that mass culture representations of urban space, especially the film noir of the late 1940s, inspired white flight by portraying central Los Angeles as corrupt and racially impure.<sup>5</sup> Certainly Angelenos of the 1950s made decisions about where to live based on received knowledge about the qualities of different places. Mediated imagery no doubt augmented personal experiences as a source of that knowledge. But film noir was not the only source of such ideas. Historians and critics have drawn on films both iconic and obscure to examine the history of Los Angeles's image, while largely ignoring television.<sup>6</sup> This focus on film promotes a systemic bias toward presuming that certain urban images—particularly from film noir—were the most dominant influences on the worldviews of historical audiences. Noir was an expressive mode that tied the ideas of urbanity, corruption, and racial difference into a discourse of futility about Los Angeles and other cities that Norman Klein has called “essentially a mythos about white male panic.”<sup>7</sup> Noir reached its artistic and commercial peak in the late 1940s, just as mass suburbanization took off. Accordingly, historians have identified it as an indicator of a collective understanding that the city was irredeemable.<sup>8</sup>

Historians who want to understand the contents and effects of media images of metropolitan space on suburbanization cannot ignore television. Films were in steep decline in the late 1940s and 1950s; theater attendance fell by half between 1946 and 1953, while 90

5. Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 8.

6. This oversight is particularly visible in film historian Thom Andersen's comprehensive documentary film chronicle of celluloid depictions of Los Angeles, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (NBC Universal Audio Video Technology, 2003). Surveys of national representations of urban and suburban spaces likewise focus on films. Douglas Muzzio and Thomas Halper, “Pleasantville? The Suburb and Its Representation in American Movies,” *Urban Affairs Review* 37, no. 4 (2002): 543–574; Robert Beuka, *Suburbia Nation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

7. Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997), 79.

8. Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*; Muzzio and Halper, “Pleasantville? The Suburb and Its Representation in American Movies.”



percent of American homes had television sets by 1960.<sup>9</sup> Historical scholars of the newer medium have certainly considered television as a *practice*—particularly a domestic, private entertainment—but they have devoted less attention to content. Lynn Spigel, notably, has emphasized the concurrent growth of the suburbs and television as “engineered spaces” that were effectively “purified” through technological innovation in housing and transportation as well as media.<sup>10</sup> Scholars have further defined television as a suburban medium through reference to programs with suburban settings and particularly those with characters who moved from urban neighborhoods to the suburbs. The lived space of the suburb and the media space of television were mutually validating; suburbanites understood their place in the world through suburban content which they encountered in the private space of the suburban home.<sup>11</sup> The cultural histories of television and film create a dichotomous understanding of media’s influence on suburbanization: film noir damned the corrupted city while television affirmed the suburbs as sites of purity, safety, and opportunity, influencing the middle class to reject the former and embrace the latter.

Neither the film noir theme of corruption nor the purified space of the suburbs, however, accurately describes the televised image of greater Los Angeles in the 1950s and early 1960s. Television programs made in and depicting Los Angeles presented a far more complex and nuanced picture of city life. Many of them defined the city as the center of the metropolitan region and expressed a sense that the white middle class—the people presumably being scared out of the city by film noir—had a place in the city. Broadcasters, writers, producers, and critics reluctantly relinquished this centripetal orientation only after the core of their audience had embraced suburbanization.

9. Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, Rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 272; Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 224; Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

10. Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 33–34.

11. *Ibid.*, 5; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, *American Culture* 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 40.

## CIVIC ENRICHMENT AND URBAN ADVENTURE ON TELEVISION

Three important differences between television and movies as cultural products contributed to television's distinct portrayals of urban and metropolitan life. First, television audiences encountered the medium in their own homes. As Spigel has shown, producers and advertisers were cautious about introducing potentially inflammatory or disturbing material into the domestic sphere.<sup>12</sup> Second, television stations had a local base, and saw themselves as socially responsible and community-serving institutions.<sup>13</sup> These stations accordingly regarded their local public affairs and community-oriented programs as sources of prestige. Third, the visual conventions developed for films were impossible to replicate on the typical twelve-inch television screen of the 1950s, with uneven reception, low resolution, and occasional problems with image integrity. Therefore, while film noir used striking and dramatic visual codes to express messages about urban space, television programs relied far more on narrative and particularly on the role of hosting personalities to greet, engage, and hold viewers' attention. Television stations accordingly viewed the programs that they produced as opportunities to use the medium's strengths—its immediacy and its flexibility—to build relationships with its viewers around their common community, which compensated for the comparative visual dullness of many of the programs.

One of the best examples of the television program as urban community ambassador was *The City at Night*, hosted by Ken Grau on KTLA between 1950 and 1960. The show's efforts to represent a common community for the vast metropolis reflected a utopian value held by television executives nationwide for building community across geographical distance.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the show repeatedly won recognition in the 1950s as a valuable contributor to public culture in Los Angeles. California Governor Earl Warren honored KTLA for local broadcasting achievement in 1951, lauding *The City at Night* as exemplary of the civic enrichment the station provided. The precise categorizations

12. Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 109.

13. This ethos began with nineteenth-century newspapers, whose publishers understood that expressing a particular metropolitan vision could improve both their public standing and their competitiveness against rivals. David Paul Nord, "The Public Community: The Urbanization of Journalism in Chicago," *Journal of Urban History* 11, no. 4 (1985): 411–441.

14. Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, 36.

for public interest shows changed, but *The City at Night* remained a consistent winner of local Emmy awards. In 1951 it was recognized as the best "public service" program, in 1952 the best "public affairs" program, and in 1955 the best "educational" show on local television.<sup>15</sup>

While the show's prestige within the television community was strong, the means by which it achieved its goals were surprising. Despite the program's noirish title, it was not a crime drama but a weekly documentary based on the gimmick of "surprise" locations and subjects. The program used new remote camera technology to broadcast live from locations around Los Angeles and the production crew and the on-air personalities were generally kept in the dark about where they would be shooting until they reached the week's location.<sup>16</sup> The conceit of secrecy was sometimes observed in the breach; KTLA occasionally leaked a location to the *Los Angeles Times* television columnist Walter Ames, who would promote the episode with winking nods to secrecy: "don't tell [station manager] Klaus Landsberg I told you this.... It's supposed to be a secret."<sup>17</sup> The subjects of *The City at Night* were usually far from gritty. The episode topics that can be tracked from published television listings in the *Los Angeles Times* included circuses, university homecomings, and entertainments like the Club Deauville's "Aqua Follies" revue alongside more serious subjects such as the Los Angeles Braille Institute's services to the blind.

The element of surprise and the portrayal of urban space as intrinsically exciting reflected geographer Michael Johns's observation that, despite the emergence of suburbanization, "America reached its peak as an urban society in the 1950s," when downtowns were regarded as centers of sophistication, style, and pleasure.<sup>18</sup> In retrospect, the practice of viewing television in private single-family houses on the suburban fringe undermined both the utopian communitarianism and

15. Alan Young, "Gertrude Berg Wins TV Honors for 1950," *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1951; "Bishop Sheen Named Top Personality on TV," *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1953; Walter Ames, "Nominees for Local TV Shows Revealed; Cornell to Do 'Wimpole Street'," *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1956.

16. Steve Skinner, "The First Twenty Years: KTLA's Twentieth Anniversary Show," May 28, 1967, Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

17. Walter Ames, "Frosty Frolics Has Wedding on Ice Tonight; Crosby Host to Bogart, Bacall on Show," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1952; Walter Ames, "Fans Moan Over Lack of Grid TV; Christmas Show Set," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1956.

18. Michael Johns, *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.



the urbanity favored by the show's producers. But in the early 1950s producers ignored the sociospatial contradictions of the moment. For example, *The City at Night*'s first broadcast in color, a spectacular achievement for the medium, featured the 1956 General Motors "Motorama" auto show.<sup>19</sup> Automobility was among the forces at work undermining Los Angeles's centrality in the region, but in 1956 it made sense to view Motorama as evidence that Los Angeles was the region's central repository of unpredictable, enjoyable, and frequently glamorous urban experiences.

The producers' evident desire to promote community cohesion and champion the city of Los Angeles as the center of the region's identity inspired enthusiasm from local television critics and, at first, from audiences. As the 1950s concluded, however, only the critics remained steadfast advocates of the public interest program and the local documentary. Local television critics lamented the increased domination of insipid national network shows over the ratings and the programming decisions of local stations. Cecil Smith, the *Times*'s television critic in the early 1960s, argued with occasional bitterness that the medium had failed to live up to its earlier promise. When *The City at Night* was passed over for a local Emmy for the 1960 season, Smith felt called to question "what television's true function is—to amuse, to amaze, to shock, to titillate...to widen horizons or (more often) narrow them, to be a window on the world or just to sell products."<sup>20</sup> Smith principally blamed the rising influence of network programming. The pursuit of a mass audience, he complained, led to insipid programming unconnected to the local community—the "local documentary, once a mainstay of local TV, has become a sometime thing."<sup>21</sup>

Despite Smith's criticisms, some network programs in the late 1950s did retain an intense focus on the local scene and used the city of Los Angeles as their window onto a world of wide and diverse possibilities. Critics like Smith may have overlooked these programs because they were not prime time "prestige" shows but daytime programs aimed at housewives, whom industry executives and critics often

19. Skinner, "The First Twenty Years"; Walter Ames, "Color Show Set for GM Motorama," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1956.

20. Cecil Smith, "The TV Scene: Chalk One up for Television," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1961.

21. Cecil Smith, "The TV Scene: Video Specs Will Fill Tube Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1961.



A housewife irons while watching television, 1952.  
*Time-Life image, courtesy Getty Images.*

regarded as an undiscerning audience.<sup>22</sup> These prejudices, however, were not always borne out in the televised product. *On the Go*, hosted by Jack Linkletter, the son of popular TV personality Art Linkletter, debuted on the CBS network in 1959. Like *The City at Night*, it used

22. Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 80.



mobile videotape equipment to, as each episode's voiceover preamble promised, accompany Linkletter "going places, doing things, and meeting people in their pursuit of happiness." Linkletter envisioned his program as serving an audience of suburban housewives taking a 9:00 break from domestic chores. He believed a studio program would make the imagined housewife-viewer feel that "again she's trapped between four walls."<sup>23</sup> Mobile broadcasting, on the other hand, would support a broader view of the world.

*On the Go's* treatment of its subjects defied expectations for a program promoted as a diversion for housebound women. Linkletter's youthful optimism infused his enthusiasm for social exploration: "I'm young and want to find out things.... I think all people feel that way. Some of the places we visit help satisfy their curiosity."<sup>24</sup> Linkletter assumed his viewers' curiosity extended to complex and even troubling aspects of society. The show's subjects included California's *Bracero* workers; state prisons for men at Chino and for women at Corona (at the latter, incarcerated mothers described being separated from their children at Christmastime); cancer hospitals; treatment facilities for epileptics, alcoholics, and drug addicts; and the Midnight Mission serving Los Angeles's homeless and destitute.<sup>25</sup> Though cultural historians have argued that suburbanites sought refuge from such social complexities in "purified" spaces in the suburbs, television provided a mediated path for those issues to enter the suburban home.

While *On the Go* eventually covered 18,000 miles and visited sixty cities in the United States and Canada, the 1959 season was set in and around Los Angeles so that Linkletter, then twenty-one years old, could complete his studies in English at the University of Southern California. Linkletter graduated Phi Beta Kappa, making five A's in that final semester. Ironically, his only B grade came in a course on telecommunications.<sup>26</sup> As a consequence of the geographical constraint the USC campus near downtown imposed on Linkletter, the show's window on the world looked out most often on urban scenes. And its representations of urban places and issues

23. Cecil Smith, "On the Go to Beam World to Housewife," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1959; Tepper, "Interest for Housewife."

24. Tepper, "Interest for Housewife."

25. Subject information for *On the Go* is available through the online catalogue of the UCLA Film and Television Archive at <http://cinema.library.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>.

26. Art Ryon, "Ham On Ryon: Game Called Because of Automation," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1959.



often surpassed “prestige” programs like *The City at Night* in terms of serious engagement with complex social issues. As the guide to each episode’s urban travelogue, Linkletter made an earnest effort to portray the city’s diverse communities and neighborhoods evenhandedly and to allow subjects to speak for themselves.

Occasionally, the result was somewhat comical, as when the suit-and-tie-clad Linkletter ventured to the Gas House, a beat coffeehouse in the beachside Venice district of Los Angeles. Linkletter certainly appeared more dressed for a collegiate glee club than a beatnik café at the center of the city’s largest countercultural movement.<sup>27</sup> The beats were by 1959 a ripe target for cheap gags and voyeuristic interest on television. *Times* television critic Fred Danzig suggested that “the Beatniks’ great contribution to American culture will be that they supplied TV comedians, comedy writers, and choreographers with a full season of material.”<sup>28</sup> *On the Go*, for its part, indulged in some clichéd depictions, showcasing the stereotypical dress, music, and ennui associated with the subculture. However, the show’s visit to the Gas House supported a deeper discussion of the political controversies surrounding the Gas House, its habitués, and their Venice neighbors.

As Sarah Schrank has demonstrated, Los Angeles artists flocked to the inexpensive beachside neighborhood of Venice as part of a strategy to form a more coherent “scene.” The Gas House, operated by Eric “Big Daddy” Nord, functioned as “town hall, watering hole, and crash pad for the authors and painters who lived in or visited the area.”<sup>29</sup> In Venice, the attraction of the beat lifestyle for disaffected youth from across the nation provoked intense hostility from homeowners and civic groups. One such group, the Venice Civic Union, enlisted the Los Angeles Police Department in a crusade to purge the beats from public life.<sup>30</sup> At the time, all establishments hosting musical performances or dancing were required by city ordinance to have an entertainment license, a regulation which subjected them to scrutiny from the Los Angeles Police Department, which could

27. “*On the Go: Venice West No. 2*,” 1959, Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

28. Fred Danzig, “Rowe Show Has Long Row to Hoe,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1959.

29. Sarah Schrank, *Art and the City: Civic Imagination and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 107.

30. *Ibid.*, 109–111.

revoke a license on the pretext of immoral activity or a hazard to the surrounding community. Nord had applied for a license, but in August 1959 the Civic Union demanded police hearings on the matter, claiming that the café sponsored moral degeneracy.<sup>31</sup> *On the Go* became aware of the Gas House controversy as a result of the Civic Union's demand for police hearings. Before the Gas House episode aired, the Civic Union implored both CBS and its local affiliate station to suppress it: "unless you can see or find another story in Venice that will prove to the world we are not a slum area and this community is made up of hard-working, respectable people, we ask you to hold up release of the show."<sup>32</sup> CBS rebuffed the request and the episode aired on August 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, two weeks before the license hearings opened.

*On the Go* visually depicted the beats' rejection of bourgeois values. In close shots, men's beards and women's masculine-inspired, mostly black clothes reinforced their countercultural status. Medium shots linked the beats' personal dress and self-presentation to the backdrop of the abstract art they had created. More scandalously, perhaps, the cameras showed substantial interaction between white and African American patrons of the Gas House. Accordingly, viewers inclined against the beats probably found ample confirmation of their distaste. However, the Venice Civic Union, outraged by what it saw as favorable treatment of the beats, complained to the Police Commission that *On the Go* was acting as Nord's publicity agent.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the program's narrative, rather than portraying the beats as a blighting force or a moral hazard requiring police repression, cast them as contributing, if unusual, members of the community. Linkletter gave a respectful hearing to Lawrence Lipton, whose recently published book *The Holy Barbarians* declared the beats' willful alienation from American society and called for "new values" rejecting conformity and materialism. Some of Linkletter's questions were somewhat obtuse. For example, while interviewing Arthur Richer about what the artist called a "redone book" format (Richer applied paint to the pages of scavenged books to refigure the form and meaning of the prose), Linkletter suggested that it ran "counter to your whole philosophy of

31. Ibid., 111.

32. "Venice 'Beatniks' Battle 'Neatniks,'" *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1959.

33. "Filed With Commission: Beatnik Affidavit," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1959.

life" to sell art for money, to which Richer responded that he lived "in poverty involuntarily" and would, if he had money, "spend it as fast as anybody else and with as much fun and as much beauty."<sup>34</sup> Though his question reflected, perhaps appropriately, a postwar college undergraduate's search for ethical absolutes, Linkletter did not take the last word and declare the beats hypocrites or dilettantes, but allowed viewers to connect the Gas House scene to the program's classically American theme of "the pursuit of happiness."

One can only guess at the response a suburban housewife may have had to the spectacle of the Gas House. Some may have been unsettled by Richer's existentialist description of security as the situation of "a man who works, has a trade, builds his possessions up to a mounting sum, and then he walks around the corner and is mowed down by a truck."<sup>35</sup> But some may have felt a resonance between the beats' claims to self-expression and contemporary criticisms of suburban life as sterile and shallow.<sup>36</sup> Although the audience response is perhaps unknowable, the way that television and grassroots politics collided around the Gas House confounds some historical expectations. It was not television producers but the members of an urban grassroots movement whose crusade denied the Gas House's license, prompted Nord's jailing for defiance of the ruling, and secured the condemnation and demolition of the Gas House in 1960.<sup>37</sup> *On the Go's* visit indicated that television producers were not always agents of cultural homogenization. In Venice, they were far more willing than public officials and local civic organizations to entertain the challenge the beats presented to social mores.

The Gas House episode was not the only occasion when *On the Go* looked to the arts and artists in urban Los Angeles for its subject matter. Another 1959 episode introduced viewers to the effort to save the Watts Towers from demolition by the city Building Department.<sup>38</sup>

34. "On the Go: Venice West No. 2."

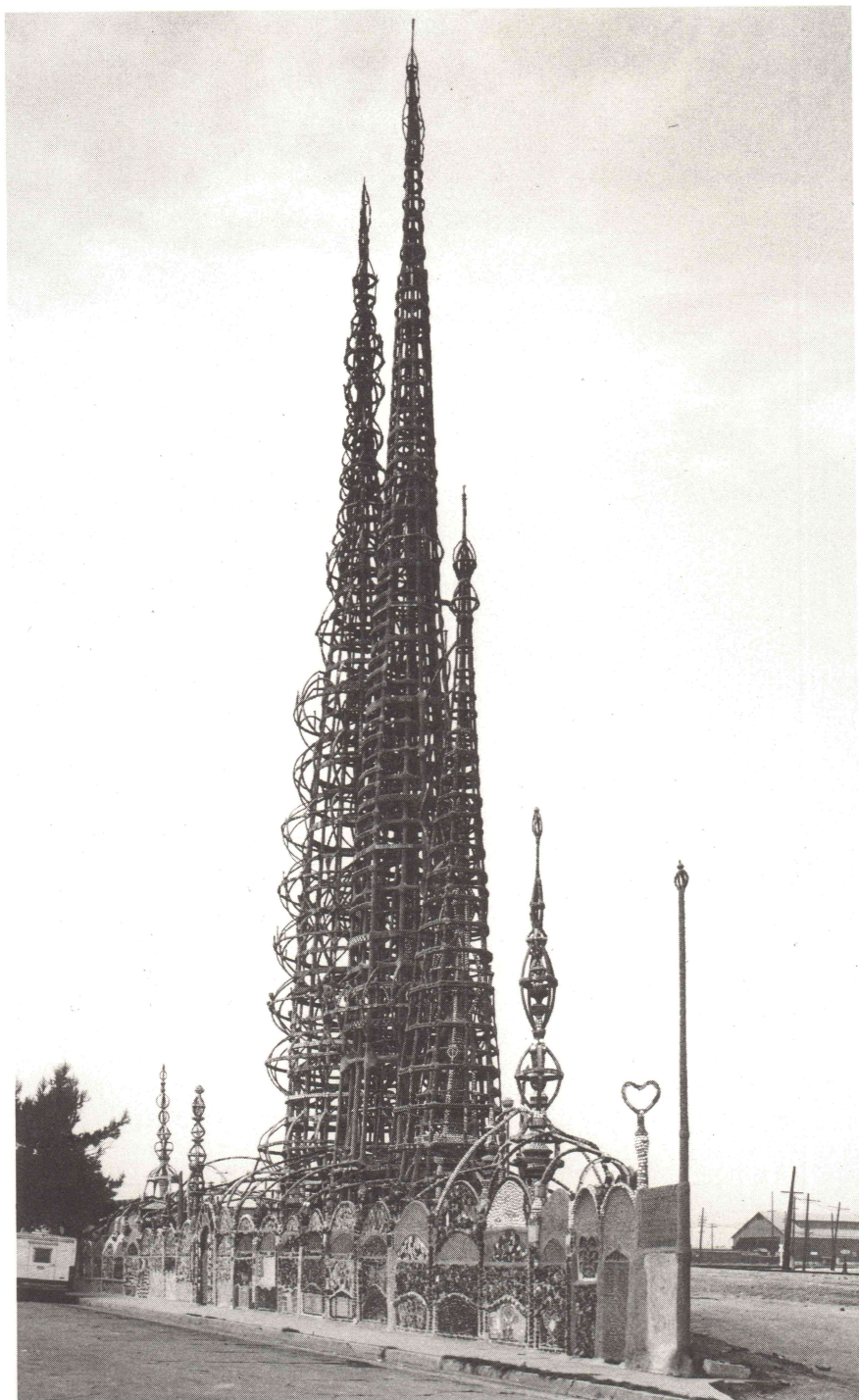
35. Ibid.

36. Of course, as Becky Nicolaides argues, these critiques existed side by side with descriptions of suburban life as oppressively socialized, suggesting that collective representations of the suburbs were subject to the same mediation as those of cities. "How Hell Moved from the City to the Suburbs: Urban Scholars and Changing Perceptions of Authentic Community," in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin Michael Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 97.

37. For a history of the resolution of the Venice controversy, see Schrank, *Art and the City*, 110–113.

38. "On the Go: Watts Tower," 1959, Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.





Watts Towers, the work of Simon Rodia at 1765 E. 177<sup>th</sup> Street, Los Angeles.  
Undated. Vanguard Photography. *California Historical Society Collection.*  
*Courtesy USC Libraries Special Collections.*

Italian Immigrant and Watts resident Sabato (more frequently called Simon) Rodia built the five latticelike structures, nearly 100 feet tall, out of rebar, cement, and scavenged glass and tile, but had recently left his property to a neighbor and moved to northern California, avoiding the controversies that surrounded his idiosyncratic labor of three decades.<sup>39</sup> Supplemented by an audio recording of Rodia describing his work, Linkletter opened the program summarizing the controversy over the towers. First, he interviewed Bill Cartwright and Nick King, who had purchased the property and established the preservationist Committee for Simon Rodia's Tower in Watts a year before. The two described their intention to develop a local cultural center and to preserve the towers as a public monument. Bill Manley of the Los Angeles Building and Safety Department countered with his professional opinion of the towers as "the biggest pile of junk in Los Angeles," and the personal declaration that "I don't think there's anything here to appreciate." Linkletter seemed to side with the preservationists in his own remarks, and gave extended time on camera to other experts including Jules Langsner of *Art and Architecture* magazine, who described the towers as part of a "found art" tradition of "discovering and making patterns out of the discarded refuse of our civilization."<sup>40</sup> This was heady stuff for the show's presumed audience of suburban housewives, particularly since the suburbs were so strongly associated with newness, consumption, and modern conveniences.

While *On the Go* challenged some of the aesthetic prerogatives of the growing suburbs, the show was far less successful in dealing with the social conflicts of the suburbanizing metropolis. While the Watts Towers episode framed the towers as a cultural landmark and significant work of art, it almost entirely ignored the African American and Mexican American neighborhood around the Towers. The most dominant visual images from the episode were extreme close-ups of the surfaces of the towers. While these shots showed Rodia's obsessive handiwork in setting chips of glass and pottery into the latticed supports of the towers, they obliterated the larger context, a framing that was mirrored in the episode's approach to the Watts area. The camera's vantage for the episode never left Rodia's former

39. Schrank, *Art and the City*, 137–139.

40. "On the Go: Watts Tower."



property, and interviews with white artists and preservationists dominated the program. Rodia's Mexican American neighbors did appear to express their sense that the neighbors wanted the towers preserved, though they appeared somewhat bemused by the attention paid by white artists to their working-class neighborhood. As Schrank argues, preservationists generally portrayed the towers as an entity separate from the surrounding neighborhood because the case for the preservation of art, while by no means a sure political winner, was still politically sounder than the case for protecting property owned by poor minorities. Indeed, at the same time as preservationists sought to save the towers, the city's Building and Safety Commission was ordering the demolition of some three thousand residential properties in Watts as part of a slum clearance campaign.<sup>41</sup> The southward extension of the Harbor Freeway further isolated the African American and ethnic Mexican residents of Watts from white middle-class life in the region. The freeway reached 88<sup>th</sup> Place, the northern edge of Watts, in 1957, and Century Boulevard and 124<sup>th</sup> Street south of Watts by 1958, replacing surface highways and the city's streetcar system as conduits for traffic to the harbor and the beaches. Angelenos living outside of Watts by 1959 were thus unlikely to see the towers except on television.<sup>42</sup> This context made it all the more remarkable that the program proposed that a plot of land at 107<sup>th</sup> Street and Avalon Boulevard in Watts could be a destination for self-realization through aesthetic contemplation and a valued part of metropolitan cultural life. But, while television programs engaged willingly with the politics of preserving art in Watts, they proved unwilling to consider the area's inhabitants as also part of the metropolitan community.

Other episodes reflected the difficulty of representing ethnic diversity in Los Angeles within the implicit white racial frame of television. Cultural misapprehensions abounded when Linkletter and *On the Go* visited Olvera Street, a commercial development near downtown Los Angeles built in 1930 as a romanticized simulacrum of a Mexican village. Billed as a "Mexican Street of Yesterday in a City of Today," Olvera Street, in Phoebe Kropp's terms, "simultaneously celebrated the Mexican character of Los Angeles and segregated it,

41. Schrank, *Art and the City*, 139, 148.

42. *Ibid.*, 139.



relegating it to the past.”<sup>43</sup> This romanticism symbolically pushed the city’s large ethnic Mexican population to a marginal position in the metropolis even as it embraced an ersatz version of Mexican life in the shadow of City Hall. *On the Go* accepted this framing, describing Olvera Street as “a city within a city” and “a little bit of Old Mexico.”<sup>44</sup>

Mexican American people interviewed in the episode were largely unsuccessful in pushing against the bounds of this framing. Linkletter began his interview with Mariano Valdez, the general manager of the marketplace, with a halting greeting of “Buenos... días?” which was wholly unnecessary given Valdez’s fluent English. While Valdez described his arrival in the United States in the 1920s and his three decades of business in Los Angeles, his autobiography was poorly integrated with travelogue imagery of rural handicrafts. Linkletter asked Valdez if Mexican immigrants found it easier to live in a Mexican community “instead of integrating,” a question that obscured the past destruction of multiethnic residential communities in the Plaza district that surrounded Olvera Street, the deportation of 75,000 Mexican nationals from the Plaza in 1931, and ongoing racial exclusion from Anglo neighborhoods in the city and the suburbs.<sup>45</sup> For his part, Valdez answered that his own children were upwardly mobile and reassured Linkletter, probably with some sardonic intent, that his own choice of residence with other Mexicans reflected no prejudice against Anglos! Linkletter’s closing statement that “anybody who comes to Los Angeles really doesn’t see Los Angeles unless they come to Olvera Street” was, in its own way, true. The setting highlighted many Anglo-normative presumptions about urban space that prevented understanding or accepting contemporary ethnic Mexicans in Los Angeles as citizens, businessmen, or socially integrated members

43. Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 208. See also William F. Devereaux, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 59.

44. “*On the Go: Olvera Street*,” 1960, Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

45. George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 198–199; Kropp, *California Vieja*, 231; Wild, *Street Meeting*, 38–39; Jerry B. Gonzalez, “‘A Place in the Sun’: Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles, 1940–1980” (PhD, University of Southern California, 2009), 29.

of the civic body. The episode broke from the film-noir theme of racial contagion, but replaced it with paternalistic tropes of mutually-agreed racial containment.

In other episodes, the urban subject matter was grimmer, as when Linkletter visited the Volunteers of America alcoholism treatment facility on Skid Row. Linkletter offered a sympathetic framing of alcoholism as a human problem, but the episode as a whole unavoidably framed alcoholism and vagrancy as urban problems, definitively *placing* the region's substance abuse problem in central Los Angeles. While the show focused on Skid Row, it emphasized the likelihood of social problems shifting to surrounding parts of the city. Linkletter interviewed USC Professor William Heinman, who offered a discouraging assessment of the cycle of urban blight. Noting that "no city is getting ahead of its blight," Heinman opined that the effort to purge the city center of vagrants was ill fated: if their haunts around Fifth and Main Streets were razed, "they'll find a new blighted area in which a new Skid Row will develop." Suburban audiences could be forgiven for taking away the lesson that neighborhoods in central Los Angeles were, the efforts of kind-hearted doctors notwithstanding, living on borrowed time before being overrun with indigent alcoholics. This was a fundamental problem of representing the city as a civic whole; if one embraced individual expression, artistic inspiration, and a highly circumscribed measure of ethnic diversity as civic goods located in urban space, one would unavoidably have to embrace urbanity's more negative aspects as well.<sup>46</sup>

#### LOCAL TELEVISION BECOMES SUBURBAN

*The City at Night* and *On the Go* reflected breaches and shifts in television's content and its relationship to social life in greater Los Angeles. These programs defied the binary of the noir city and the purified suburb and sought to portray urban neighborhoods and lifestyles in terms of excitement, worldliness, and exposure to new ideas and experiences, though they could not entirely suppress more difficult issues of racial diversity or social problems. As the 1960s unfolded, fewer television programs were willing to engage with this degree of

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46. "On the Go: Skid Row," 1959, Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

urban complexity. Even local programs stopped championing a centripetal metropolitan culture organized around central Los Angeles. One of the last episodes of *The City at Night*, broadcast in 1960, “recorded the crumbling majesty of Bunker Hill,” a formerly exclusive residential neighborhood whose Victorian mansions had fallen into disrepair.<sup>47</sup> That decline had been helped along by multiple public and private agencies, beginning with the 1939 report by Federal Home Owners Loan Corporation surveyors who rated the area as a “thoroughly blighted” district where “subversive racial elements predominate; dilapidation and squalor are everywhere in evidence.”<sup>48</sup> These judgments limited the flow of credit to improve or maintain housing stock and ensured further dilapidation. The Los Angeles City Council had in 1958 approved a plan by the city’s Community Redevelopment Agency to raze 136 acres of land on Bunker Hill, pending land acquisitions that would begin in 1961 and demolitions scheduled for 1962.<sup>49</sup> *The City at Night* incorporated the CRA’s rhetoric, expressing nostalgia for past “majesty” but fully accepting the agency’s contention that Bunker Hill was “crumbling” and irredeemable. The program had little difficulty by 1960 in finding images that conveyed this message. Shots of moribund Victorian houses, exteriors marred by neglect and by grafted-on iron fire escapes that accompanied their subdivision into single-room apartments visually affirmed that the area was afflicted by blight “so bad that it could be addressed neither by conservation nor by rehabilitation.”<sup>50</sup>

By 1960 the “city at night” seemed to be less identifiable with glamour and adventure than with poverty and decay; it no longer seemed a place where viewers wished to visit, even through the medium of television. Much like Bunker Hill, *The City at Night* and the urbanist focus it exemplified were doomed by changes in the metropolitan region and its television audience, and the show went off the air in 1960. It was revived in 1961 under the new name *Line of*

47. Skinner, “The First Twenty Years.”

48. U.S. Home Owners Loan Corporation, “Area D-37,” 1939, Los Angeles City Survey Files, U.S. Home Owners Loan Corporation, Records Group 195, National Archives.

49. Mara A. Cohen-Marks, “Community Redevelopment,” in *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional History, 1850–2000*, ed. Hynda Rudd et al. (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles Historical Society, 2007), 426–427; Donald Craig Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 150.

50. Parson, *Making a Better World*, 153. See also Klein, *History of Forgetting*, 45–46.



*Sight*, but its focus, tone, and implicit framing of the metropolitan area were different. Its subjects were no longer held secret, and the retooled program tried more to showcase “local color” than to represent a coherent bond of community across the region, with plans for shows on plastic surgery, music, art, mathematics, burlesque, “poker palaces,” and other “oddities of Southern California.”<sup>51</sup> While producers still hoped urban subjects could attract viewer interest, their depiction as “oddities” reflected a transformed representation of a region of loosely connected places, the proverbial “suburbs in search of a city.”<sup>52</sup>

*Ralph Story's Los Angeles*, a “magazine” program that aired on the local CBS station KNXT from 1964 to 1970, was without a doubt the most successful program to adopt this new perspective. Born Ralph Bernard Snyder in Kalamazoo in 1920, Story moved to Los Angeles to advance his career in broadcasting at KNX-CBS radio, first adopting a less ethnic air name in 1948 at the suggestion of station management. In the 1950s, Story pioneered what would become the signature duty of morning news reporters in the automobile-centered metropolis: delivering traffic reports. Story also had a stint hosting the quiz show *The \$64,000 Challenge*, before revelations of corruption in other game shows effectively killed the genre. Story was never personally associated with any wrongdoing, and emerged from the scandal to join KNXT's *Big News* evening broadcast, where he carved a niche for himself with recurring “human predicament” segments.<sup>53</sup> These led to a new opportunity in 1964 when station management asked him to host a new show about greater Los Angeles to carry on the tradition of local documentary programs through a “prime-time public service program.” Initially, Story was skeptical of the show's prospects, remembering himself as “the pigeon assigned to it.”<sup>54</sup> Story's pessimism proved unwarranted, perhaps because the

51. Cecil Smith, “Bimbo Foresees Whale of a Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1961.

52. This quotation has a tangled morphology and multiple attributions. Its most frequently referenced iteration, “seventy-two suburbs in search of a city,” has been credited to both Dorothy Parker and Alexander Woolcott, though it is more authoritatively traced, as “nineteen suburbs in search of a metropolis,” to Aldous Huxley's 1925 *Americana*. Hugh Rawson and Margaret Miner, “Huxley, Aldous,” *The Oxford Dictionary of American Quotations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

53. Don Page, “That's the Story of Ralph's Life,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1965; “Ralph Story's Series on L.A. Seen Sundays,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1966.

54. Page, “That's the Story of Ralph's Life.”

resulting program was very different from the documentary programs that preceded it.

The tone and content of *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* demonstrated the elasticity of the term "public service" within the television industry. More importantly it demonstrated a profound shift in local television's framing of the metropolitan area. The opening credits, an animated illustration of a car on a highway at night, gave the perspective of a driver cresting the mountains to see the lights of the Los Angeles basin, reflecting the viewpoint of an outsider (perhaps a migrant from Story's native Midwest or a day tripper from the suburbs) arriving in the sprawling metropolitan area. Story affected a folksy rather than an urbane demeanor, speaking with a slight twang and voicing gently sardonic comments on the metropolis. One critic admired how Story's folksiness "dealt with the insults fired at Los Angeles, quoting W.C. Fields' observation that the city was 'Double Dubuque' and Carl Reiner's comment that the new high-rise buildings 'look like the boxes Disneyland came in.'"<sup>55</sup>

However, while Story defended Los Angeles, he didn't use the standards—urbanity, sophistication, or bustling activity—that a *New Yorker* would have used to defend Manhattan. Story instead deftly characterized Southern California in populist terms as a region of regular folks. His gift as a host was to infuse a vast range of subject matter with this ethos. At the most trivial level, a brief segment from 1967 addressed the theme of embarrassment through on-street interviews in which people described embarrassing moments. Story praised this show of "honest emotion," contrasted it to the coolness portrayed by urban sophisticates, and compared it favorably to the kind of humble sociability one might encounter "in Iowa."<sup>56</sup> Though neither the interviewees' hometowns nor the locations of the interviews were specified, the backgrounds appeared to be suburban business districts, and the whiteness of the respondents, their simple dress, and the generally domestic character of their embarrassments evoked a suburban image. The segment, though slight, made a strong rhetorical point—that Greater Los Angeles's best face was that of

55. Cecil Smith, "Offbeat View of an Upbeat City," *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1964.

56. "Ralph Story's Los Angeles No. 164-C" (Los Angeles: KNXT, 1967), Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

its suburbanites, whose warmth and humility had more in common with the idealized Midwest than with the coasts.

Critics and audiences were polarized by Story's folksy populist delivery and depiction of the region. On its debut, Cecil Smith wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that Story delivered "a rather amiable, gentle show which, apparently, will ruffle no feathers but offers information in a nice, soothing, bland manner."<sup>57</sup> Smith had championed *The City at Night*, and inevitably compared *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* to the older show, arguing that it "has neither the depth nor the skill...but it does offer a gentle, parenthetical comment on the way we live, which has value."<sup>58</sup> Such faint critical praise was hardly sufficient to damn the program, however; it frequently topped the ratings for its time slot and won a local Emmy award for the 1965 season. Even Smith had to concede that Story was the best contemporary chronicler of the region, though his delivery grated on Smith's critical sensibilities. In one 1964 column, Smith passed along the opinion of one reader that Story's "twangy, whiny voice" was irritating and his material trite. Another reader defended Story, identifying folksiness as "part of his charm" and accusing Smith and other critics of snobbery, writing "we enjoy his show.... Guess we're just plain folk."<sup>59</sup> This conflict was only partly about presentation and style, however. It also reflected a passing of the center of cultural identity in the region from central Los Angeles to its diffused suburbs. Smith's employer, the *Times*, was then thoroughly enmeshed in a campaign led by Dorothy Chandler, wife of the paper's publisher, to raise funds and secure property for a downtown high culture "acropolis."<sup>60</sup> But Story's folksiness reflected an indifference to that agenda. While the *Times* advocated for the Music Center project as a capstone of urban renewal and a symbol of Los Angeles's arrival among world-class cities, Story was much more inclined to chronicle the lifestyles of those plain folks in the region's burgeoning suburbs.

Since the show covered so many places and subjects over its run and often addressed multiple topics in one episode, it is extremely difficult to assemble a cognitive map of the metropolis from a survey

57. Smith, "Offbeat View of an Upbeat City."

58. Cecil Smith, "The TV Scene: Story's Insights to a Megalopolis," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1964.

59. Cecil Smith, "The TV Scene: Postman Drops Them Off, Runs," *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1964.

60. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990), 71-72; Parsons, *Making a Better World*, 160.



of those varied subjects. However, notable episodes demonstrate the program's framing of the megalopolis through populist tales of social mobility and assimilation through suburbanization. Story introduced a 1967 episode examining the local Japanese American community and its history in Los Angeles's Little Tokyo neighborhood with a promise to "tell the story of the Japanese in Los Angeles, and to penetrate some Oriental mysteries."<sup>61</sup> This introduction led to a somewhat more nuanced look at Little Tokyo than its orientalist tone would have suggested. Though many older residential structures in Little Tokyo had given way to commercial and industrial land uses, Japanese Americans preserved the neighborhood as a place Angelenos could visit to consume the Japanese delicacies the program depicted, "making L.A. a sophisticated and worthwhile place to live" and enlivening the otherwise blighted central city. Yet, for the Japanese Americans themselves, "as luck would have it, they [were] not prisoners of the urban jungle," but commuted to their Little Tokyo businesses from suburban homes.<sup>62</sup> The episode included an acknowledgment of the injustice of internment, but Story encouraged viewers to accept a happy resolution: Japanese Americans, like other residents of the postwar metropolis, had overcome the past and prospered by suburbanizing.

Story used his November 21, 1965, broadcast to assess the ethnic history of the Boyle Heights neighborhood east of downtown Los Angeles, an area settled by several immigrant groups that has been called Los Angeles's version of the Lower East Side.<sup>63</sup> This diversity had historically been the community's greatest liability. Property assessors working under the auspices of the federal Home Owners Loan Commission in 1939 noticed Boyle Heights' ethnic Mexican, Jewish, Russian, and Asian residents and characterized the area as "literally honeycombed with diverse and subversive

61. "Ralph Story's Los Angeles No. 165" (Los Angeles: KNXT, October 1, 1967), Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles. Thanks to Hillary Jenks, whose research on Little Tokyo brought this episode to my attention.

62. "Ralph Story's Los Angeles No. 165." Although Story pitched this narrative to his viewers, Hillary Jenks's oral history and archival research suggests that the Nisei and later generations of Japanese Americans continued to regard Little Tokyo as a symbolic home rather than simply a place of business. Hillary Jenks, "Urban Space, Ethnic Community, and National Belonging: The Political Landscape of Memory in Little Tokyo," *GeoJournal* 73 (September 24, 2008): 231-244.

63. George J. Sánchez, "'What's Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews': Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004): 635.

racial elements” and “hopelessly heterogeneous,” judgments that consigned Boyle Heights to economic disinvestment in the postwar era.<sup>64</sup> Story partially rehabilitated Boyle Heights’s reputation as “our own permanent promised land,” relating a tale of immigration and exodus. First, “the Los Angeles River parted and the children of Israel moved westward, in the direction of Beverly Hills.”<sup>65</sup> Perhaps, Story suggested, the ethnic Mexicans who now predominated in the area would soon follow. In this interpretation, Boyle Heights was an integral part of the metropolitan community, but its value was expressed in repeated cycles of receiving immigrants who would eventually migrate *out* of the neighborhood to greener pastures in the suburbs.

Story’s interview subjects challenged that neat narrative of succession in which the Jewish exodus made way for “the children of Mexico.” Story interviewed Joe Kovner, the publisher of the *Eastside Sun* newspaper, as a representative of the Jewish community of Boyle Heights. But Kovner was more a representative of the area’s long history of multiethnic interaction, championing interracial cooperation, resistance to urban renewal, and economic justice in Boyle Heights through his newspaper. As George Sanchez argues, a small left-leaning segment of Jews who moved to southern California from outside of the region after World War II chose to settle in Boyle Heights because of its interracial history.<sup>66</sup> Even Story described Kovner as “the Mayor of Boyle Heights,” suggesting that the ethnic succession he imagined was far from simple, linear, or complete. He further extended his narrative of succession and outward mobility by interviewing Julio Gonzalez, a community relations worker who, proving the point, had moved his family eastward to the working-class suburb of Pico Rivera. As historian Jerry Gonzalez argues, however, ethnic Mexican migration to the suburbs represented a spatial shift but by no means a resolution of struggles for political, economic, and social equality in the

64. U.S. Home Owners Loan Corporation, “Area D-53,” 1939, Los Angeles City Survey Files, U.S. Home Owners Loan Corporation, Records Group 195, National Archives.

65. “Ralph Story’s Los Angeles No. 84,” November 21, 1965, Archive Research and Study Center, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles.

66. Sánchez, “What’s Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews,” 646–647; A detailed account of Kovner’s longstanding community activism can be gleaned from Rodolfo F. Acuña, *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River, 1945–1975* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications University of California at Los Angeles, 1984).

region. Many suburbs grew up around ethnic Mexican *colonias* in former agricultural areas like Pico Rivera and, while Pico Rivera included new subdivisions open to ethnic Mexicans, color lines were drawn sharply between Anglo and Mexican communities.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, Story optimistically speculated that the experiences of ethnic Mexicans in Boyle Heights would follow the pattern set by white ethnic immigrants.

Story did acknowledge that public officials had contributed to the economic and social problems of Boyle Heights through freeway construction. Over shots of the Golden State Freeway slicing through Hollenbeck Park, Story described ill-fated resistance to the highways: "they destroyed homes, desecrated parks, people fought them.... Fought them all, and lost." However, Story reconciled this bitter defeat to his optimistic narrative. Although the freeway admittedly "desecrated" the area's largest park, Story didn't view the blight of freeways on Boyle Heights as a liability because he assumed that none of the area's residents would stay for long. This speculation ignored some inconvenient facts. White voters in Los Angeles's suburbs had been prime supporters of a bitterly fought 1964 ballot initiative that had overturned California's fair housing law, going to the polls to vote for the right to discriminate in housing a scant year before the Boyle Heights episode aired.<sup>68</sup> The present condition of Boyle Heights mattered a great deal more to minority residents who faced active discrimination as an obstacle to moving elsewhere.

In his concluding assessment that an impending Mexican exodus might leave "vacancy for another lost tribe" in Boyle Heights, Story made the neighborhood important to the whole of the metropolitan area in a circumscribed way: it mattered as a place to be *from*, a monument to the urban past of metropolitan Los Angeles. When he visited the central Los Angeles neighborhoods of Boyle Heights and Little Tokyo, Story actually told his audience a parable about *suburbanization* as a great democratic experiment that might create greater opportunities for all Angelenos.

67. Gonzalez, "A Place in the Sun," 76–78.

68. Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 70.



## CONCLUSION

Local television programs that depicted Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s created collective representations that complicate the historical argument that mass culture depictions of urban space promoted suburbanization. Local programs on television fit neither the film noir frame of corruption nor the suburban ideal of television as a media space purified of contradictions and conflicts. Television was much more sanguine about the city than film was, expressing a sense that the city offered something of value to the white middle class (even if just opportunities for excitement or enrichment) and even providing a limited mediation of the anxieties created by the presence of cultural and social diversity in the city. Throughout the 1950s, local stations and network producers based in Los Angeles worked diligently, if with diminishing commercial success, to promote a positive impression of urban life, and relied on the urban setting as a source of inspiration even after much of their metropolitan audience moved to the suburbs.

The suddenness of the change in content that occurred in the mid-1960s, from the urbane and centralized perspective of shows like *The City at Night* to the diffused suburban populism of *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* suggests that producers were shaken out of their prior commitments to urban programming by audiences who could no longer relate to or no longer desired such urban content. By the early 1960s local station managers and print media critics exhibited consternation over the tastes of the metropolitan audiences and frustration that prestige programs that those critics valued went unwatched. Looking back nostalgically at *The City at Night* in 1965, critic Walt Dutton lamented the business-driven lapsing of programming that made "a station look public minded even if, in the eyes of the ratings people, no one out there is watching."<sup>69</sup> Part of what Dutton was lamenting was the gradual separation of local television from its mission of representing a civic identity, one that *Times* critics assumed would be oriented toward Los Angeles as the metropolitan center.

While historical and cultural studies do provide important insights on the potential power and influence of mass media images as collective representations of urban and metropolitan life, such

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69. Walt Dutton, "Local Television Has Awakening," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1965.

representations and social practices, like suburbanization, did not form a closed circuit. Producers could not dictate what their viewers would value nor could they control other sources of knowledge or experience that shaped audiences' increasingly suburban consciousness and identity. Changes in the society were perhaps more influential on mass culture than the reverse. The creation of new suburban governments, including twenty-six new cities incorporated in Los Angeles County between 1954 and 1960, was a crucial support for forming a new suburban identity in the region. As these suburban governments became more powerful, suburban residents became more self-consciously suburban, creating a populist public and political culture of "home rule" that conjoined localism in opposition to Los Angeles and a political economy favoring the region's "plain folk"—white middle-class homeowners.<sup>70</sup> *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* was the exemplary cultural reflection of this shift. Story's folksiness was often charming and humorous, enabling him to make wry comments on a vast and eclectic metropolitan area from the point of view of residents whose ordinariness implied a suburban address. But suburban populist political rhetoric, while it shared some similarities with Story's delivery, masked harder edged politics of "seventy-two suburbs" *against* the city.

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70. Michan Andrew Connor, "Creating Cities and Citizens: Municipal Boundaries, Place Entrepreneurs, and the Production of Race in Los Angeles County, 1926–1978" (PhD, University of Southern California, 2008), especially Chapter 6, "Home Towns and Home Rule: Empowering Suburban Los Angeles County," 349–420; Gary J. Miller, *Cities by Contract: The Politics of Municipal Incorporation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 20–21; Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 121.



Above: View of Castellammare Café and Pedestrian Bridge on Roosevelt Highway, early 1930s. *Courtesy Automobile Club of Southern California Archives.* Right: Crowds watch the finish of the 1932 Olympics 100-kilometer bicycle road race won by Italian Attilio Pavesi. *Olympic Games Official Report, Los Angeles 1932. Photo courtesy of LA84 Foundation and the United States Olympic Committee.*

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# THE HISTORIAN'S EYE

The beach beckoned in times past as it does today, with rolling breakers ceaselessly packing sand at the water's edge to create an ideal jogging path. The advent of automobile travel meant a wide range of accommodations for travelers and pedestrians alike. Here we see two such constructions: The Castellammare Café and a foot bridge spanning what was then called Roosevelt Highway, just north of Santa Monica, in the early 1930s. Both structures hold cultural meaning today but for different reasons; one forever connected to a mysterious Hollywood death, another to an all-but-forgotten Olympic triumph.

Built in 1928 to house retail space serving the then-new Castellammare development, the building was purchased by movie actress Thelma Todd and a business partner in the early 1930s. She renamed the ground floor establishment Thelma Todd's Sidewalk Café, converted the second floor into Joya's, a private nightclub, and occupied the third-floor apartment. The businesses flourished, drawing beachgoers to the café by day and Hollywood's elite and underworld figures to Joya's at night.

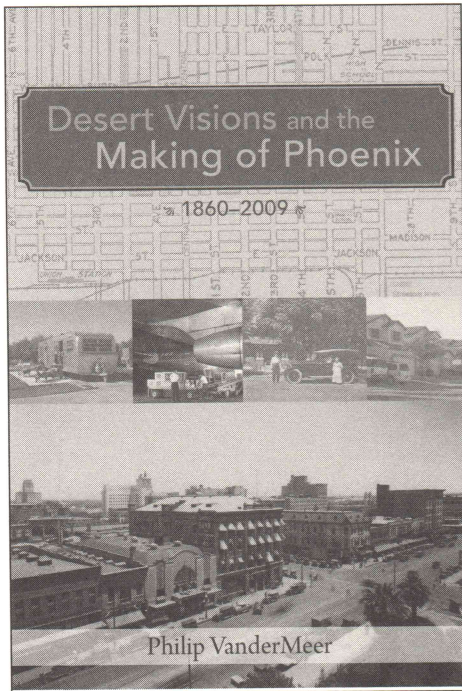
Todd's death by carbon monoxide poisoning in a nearby garage in December 1935, after a revelrous night at Café Trocadero, caused a media sensation. In spite of still-persisting speculation of foul play, officials ruled Todd's death an accident. Paulist Productions, a religious media company, has owned the building since the 1960s. While Thelma's former haunt remains remarkably unchanged, the foot bridge spanning the widened road was completely altered in 1979, while maintaining the original crossing point.

The 1932 Olympic Games official report identifies the site as the finish line for the 100 kilometer bicycle road race. The course began in Moorpark, went through El Rio and Oxnard, then down Roosevelt Highway to finish at Castellammare. Newspapers estimated crowds of up to 100,000 along the course, including thousands gathered at the finish line. The Italians dominated, with twenty-one-year-old Attilio Pavesi capturing individual gold, while his teammates placed second, fourth, and seventh. At his passing in August 2011 at age 100, Pavesi was the oldest surviving Olympic champion.

Morgan P. Yates

# BOOK REVIEWS

DESERT VISIONS AND THE MAKING OF PHOENIX: 1860–2009. By Philip VanderMeer. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010. 478 pp. \$39.95 cloth.) Reviewed by Lawrence Culver.



In *Desert Visions and the Making of Phoenix*, Philip VanderMeer has written a big, sprawling book about a big, sprawling place. Outsiders are sometimes shocked to discover that this desert metropolis is now the fifth largest city in the United States. Phoenix shares much with Los Angeles and also Las Vegas. All three grew in places that were arid and unlikely locales for big cities. All, at least until relatively recently, viewed growth as an unquestioned good and relentless self-promotion as a righteous obligation. Yet, while casinos and the Strip indelibly imprint Las Vegas, and Los Angeles has been mythologized by Hollywood, the identity and image of Phoenix are less clear. It is a desert city, certainly—even with all that irrigation and air conditioning, the Sonoran Desert that surrounds it cannot be obscured. Is it a midwestern transplant, a retiree

Mecca, a crucible for conservatism, a high tech hub, a Sunbelt city, a borderlands city, or a Mexican and immigrant metropolis? In reality, it is all of these things, and VanderMeer attempts to encompass this vast, diverse place in his book. In so doing, he has created the best and most comprehensive history of Phoenix yet written.

VanderMeer organizes his book around five central themes: the city's natural environment, its built environment, its economy, its social and cultural values, and its political leadership. He also sees three eras in the city's history, each dominated by a particular "vision" for this desert city. The first of these was a transplanted vision of an agrarian community, what VanderMeer calls an "American Eden" (6). While the struggle to secure water was a distinctly Southwestern problem, many of the community's concerns and priorities, such as urban planning, were still Midwestern in their origins. The transformative effects of World War II

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and the Cold War led the city to embrace a locally adapted “High-Tech Suburban” vision (6). This vision, though challenged by various forces from civil rights to concerns about sprawl, lasted until the 1990s, when environmental and economic concerns undercut the logic of growth and promotion. As of 2009, the nature of a new, collective vision for Phoenix remained unclear, but VanderMeer argues that it must be one that accepts the city’s natural environment.

*Desert Visions and the Making of Phoenix*, however, contains much more than five themes and three eras. Readers will learn about urban planning, infrastructure, and governance. They will learn about the histories of home construction, ranch houses, and retirement communities. Readers will discover, again and again, the challenge of water. No matter how much the city changed, the unforgiving nature of the Sonoran Desert did not. A related topic is the history of climate control. By 1940, Phoenix could already claim to be the “air-conditioned capital of the world” (85). One can also read about economic history, from the aviation industry to electronics to the economic impact of the military and tourism. The history of the city’s Mexican community is also examined, though the Native American population, and the multiple reservations in the vicinity of Phoenix, receive less analysis. There is plenty of political history, with a focus on city politics, rather than national figures such as Senator Barry Goldwater.

It is not especially striking that residents railed against federal regulations while viewing federal largess as a birthright—that was true of the entire Sunbelt, from Florida to California. What is unusual about Phoenix was the canny ability of so many city politicians and business leaders to seize on federal initiatives and funding, using them to the city’s advantage over and over again. From the Roosevelt Dam on the Salt River—the first project funded by the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902—to the shrewd agenda of banker Carl Bimson and developer Del Webb to prosper from FHA loans and other forms of federal housing spending, Phoenix landed federal money repeatedly. It may be one of the birthplaces of the New Right, but it has benefited from federal funding as much as any city in the nation. It also served as a focal point in the fight over urban sprawl. Even Goldwater supported using federal funds to protect Camelback Mountain and create the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. By the late twentieth century, growth, once an unquestioned good, had also become a problem.

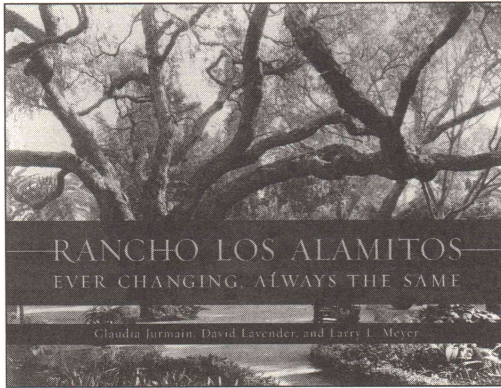
As with any book of this scope, there are potential weaknesses. One wonders just how widely shared these successive visions for the city really were—did they reflect the agendas of the masses, or just a small political and economic elite? VanderMeer also takes a risk in making a lengthy final chapter about Phoenix in the recent past and present. It is impossible to predict the future, and that seems particularly true about Phoenix. The city was especially hard hit by the collapse in housing prices that began in 2006, calling into question the region’s longstanding growth strategy. Arizona has also been roiled by contentious debates over immigration. Its political and economic elites have been dominated by Anglo Americans for much of the last century, but that may change radically in coming decades. Perhaps the Phoenix of the future will look profoundly different than the Sunbelt city it has been since the middle of the twentieth century. For that matter, humans will not unilaterally decide the fate of Phoenix—nature will have an important say. Climate change may



make existing environmental problems such as water scarcity and dust storms much worse. A city named for the mythical firebird that rose from its own ashes may well need that level of resilience to prosper amid the challenges of the twenty-first century. Knowing its history, both human and natural, will be essential to the city's future. In writing this book, VanderMeer has provided an invaluable resource for his adopted city and for anyone interested in the urban and environmental history of the Southwest, the Sunbelt, and cities in the modern United States.

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RANCHO LOS ALAMITOS: *Ever Changing, Always the Same*. By Claudia Jurmain, David Lavender, and Larry L. Meyer. Foreword by Kevin Starr. (Berkeley: Heyday, 2011. 256 pp. \$35.00 paper.) Reviewed by Holly Hernandez.



Rarely do local history projects achieve the breadth one finds in this recent publication from Heyday and the Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation. Part of this nationally recognized historic site's ongoing community education project, *Rancho Los Alamitos: Ever Changing, Always the Same* presents the history of Rancho Los Alamitos in Long

Beach within the broader narrative of southern California history. Although Jurmain, Lavender, and Meyer do not provide much in the form of argument or analysis, nevertheless their sweeping history of Rancho Los Alamitos is based on a wealth of primary sources and grounded in pertinent scholarship.

With great detail and a lively narrative voice, *Rancho Los Alamitos* charts the site's transformation over several centuries. Noting the ways each generation affected the site's landscape and material culture, the text begins with Rancho Los Alamitos's earliest settlers, the Tongva, who called the area Povuu'ngna and who venerated the landscape as the birthplace of their deity Chinigchinich. A familiar tale of Spanish colonization in eighteenth-century Alta California and its deleterious effects on Native American health and life ways naturally follows. While many natives from Povuu'ngna found themselves providing forced labor at Mission San Gabriel, a Spanish soldier by the name of Jose Manuel Perez Nieto applied for and received a sizeable Spanish land grant, 165,000 acres, including the area known to the Tongva as Povuu'ngna. Following Mexican independence and the death of Nieto, the land grant was subdivided between Nieto's heirs into five separate ranchos. Governor Jose Figueroa, in exchange for overseeing the subdivision, purchased Rancho Los Alamitos in 1834 at a bargain rate—"less than two cents an acre" (26). It was not long, however, before Rancho Los Alamitos transferred into American hands.

Abel Stearns, an “ambitious Yankee” from Massachusetts, migrated to newly independent Mexico in 1826, converted to Catholicism, and married fourteen year-old Mexican citizen Arcadia Bandini (32). Stearns amassed a fortune in Los Angeles through various business ventures, and in 1842 he purchased Rancho Los Alamitos from the late Figueroa’s indebted brother. Stearns, however, lost the ranch to a creditor during the agriculturally and economically devastating drought years of 1862 to 1864 and, now part of the western United States, the property was picked up by another easterner, John Bixby. With the help of his cousins Jotham and Llewellyn Bixby, who had arrived in California during the gold rush and already acquired Rancho Los Cerritos, John and his wife Susan Hathaway Bixby made Rancho Los Alamitos both a Victorian homestead and an increasingly profitable ranching enterprise specializing in dairy production. They also apportioned land for tenant farming. The majority of the text, however, is dedicated to the proprietorship of John and Susan’s son Fred Bixby and his wife Florence, who moved into the converted adobe at Rancho Los Alamitos in 1898. Amidst increasing urbanization, the authors explain, Fred and Florence maintained the nearly “feudal lifestyle” established at the rancho during the nineteenth century by Fred’s father, although it was the discovery of oil on Bixby family property that provided the couple and their five children financial comfort (xi).

Notably, the authors successfully integrate contemporary scholarship into their narrative of Rancho Los Alamitos and the Bixby family, acknowledging the uncomfortable aspects of the region’s past and connecting the site to California history’s broader themes and currents. Indeed, as Kevin Starr notes in the text’s foreword, “were we only to have the story of Rancho Los Alamitos at hand, we might still be able to reconstruct the outlines and successive phases of this region’s history” (viii). Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel *Ramona*, which inspired southern California boosters’ promotion of “an idyllic mission past,” for example, provides context for the rancho’s “Mission Revival” style material culture (99). Moreover, whereas many local history studies over-emphasize the dealings of prominent residents like Fred Bixby, *Rancho Los Alamitos* reveals a concerted effort on behalf of Jurmain, Lavender, and Meyer to include the voices of “worker and owner alike” (xvi). To that end, the experiences of Mexican, Japanese, and Belgian tenant farmers and ranch hands, as well as the contributions of working-class women whose labor supported the Bixby household, receive considerable attention. Moreover, quotes from recent interviews with Tongva descendants and community leaders frame the narrative.

The authors’ determination to “give voice,” however, often appears in decidedly positive terms, a proclivity that many scholars will find indulgent and unsatisfying. A featured quote from Tongva descendant Craig Torres is especially illustrative: “My mom connects to the San Gabriel Mission because that’s all she knew. It is sacred to her generation. For my generation and me it’s different because of what I know, but I still consider it a very important place in our history. I don’t like to speak about it negatively” (15). Discussion of the rancho’s labor and social structures under Fred and Florence Bixby during the first half of the twentieth century likewise receive gentle treatment, resulting in the problematic phrase,

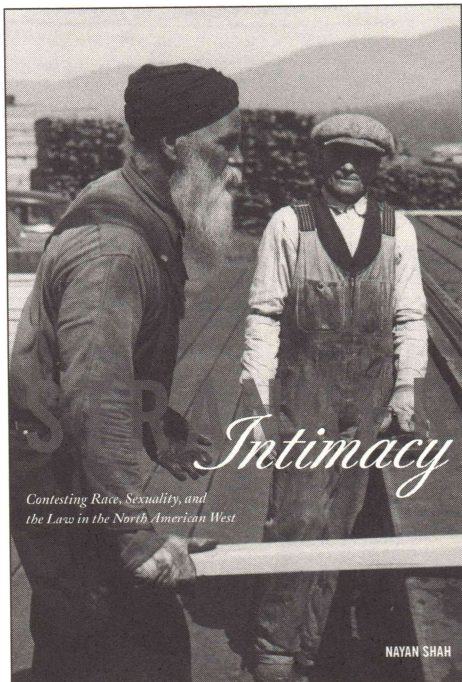


"a healthy brand of paternalism" (147). Indeed, acknowledgement coupled with optimism constitutes one of the text's consistent thematic qualities, exemplified by Jurmain's assertion that "the resilience of Rancho Los Alamitos comes from the depth of its diversity, its ready well of renewal, but its legacy echoes the enduring meaning of Povuu'ngna" (xx). This sentiment is, of course, presaged by the work's subtitle, *Ever Changing, Always the Same*.

Despite its lack of scholarly analysis, *Rancho Los Alamitos* provides readers with an engaging overview of southern California history and an in-depth look at one of the region's fascinating historical locales. Filled with stunning photography and full-color primary source images, *Rancho Los Alamitos: Ever Changing, Always the Same* is a visually captivating text that can prove useful to scholars researching nineteenth and twentieth-century California and will undoubtedly delight California history enthusiasts.

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**STRANGER INTIMACY: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West.** By Nayan Shah. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. 358 pp. \$26.95.) Reviewed by H. Mark Wild.



In *Stranger Intimacy*, Nayan Shah challenges, as he puts it, "three conceptual stabilizations that haunt historians and constrict their ability to write about movement and change...(1) permanence over transience, (2) the nuclear family household, and (3) polarized sexuality" (6). He argues that these tropes have obscured alternative kinds of interactions and affiliations that shaped the lives of people often left out of historical narratives. Shah's case study is the South Asian population of the western United States and Canada in the early twentieth century. A predominately male and highly transient population of uncertain racial classification, South Asians occupied a legally and culturally ambiguous position in North American communities. Not coincidentally, they left relatively little historical evidence as well.

Shah therefore follows others scholars who have turned to legal records for the illumination of the history of subaltern groups. His approach suits his objective; South Asians' activities—indeed, their very presence—frequently drew the attention of



authorities, which in turn generated documentation describing and proscribing a broad range of activities attributed to that group. Shah uses the same sets of sources to explore both the social landscape of "stranger intimacy"—his term for the myriad kinds of interactions and encounters that characterized the social lives of these subjects—and the legal frameworks that emerged to regulate it.

In the first of three sections Shah mines these archives for evidence of casual and transient contacts among the migrant populations with which South Asians mingled. Male sociability did not depend on the presence of families, he argues. South Asians and others embraced opportunities for "alternative and homosocial encounters" (55) in public and working spaces. Their actions, particularly when sexual activity was involved, sometimes led to violence or arrest. Yet in Shah's telling these contacts and associations offered, at least to some, an escape from conventional domesticity. Indeed, he suggests, they constituted a vital social network that sustained migrants as much as it endangered them.

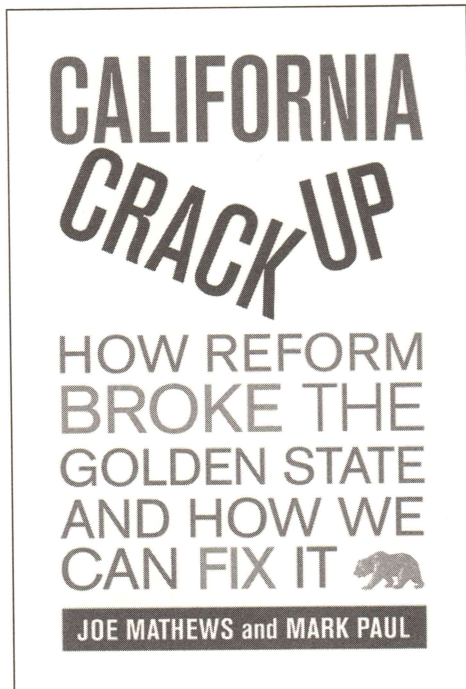
Shah reads through the coding and categorization in prosecutions for sodomy and other crimes to reveal the cultural terrain in which these interactions took place. Of course, such methodology carries risks; the careless use of legal records can exaggerate the prevalence of behavior deemed illegal and disorderly and obscure other activities the authorities chose to ignore. But, as much as is possible under these epistemological circumstances, Shah avoids this mistake. He contextualizes the actions of the court subjects in the material conditions of South Asians, the economy of the early twentieth-century North American West, and the mores of South Asian cultures. On the last point, for instance, he compares the transgressive elements of the meaning of "love" in Persian and Urdu literature to similar values in American "hobo" culture (71-72), and explains how such values could shape interethnic encounters. The result is a compelling portrait of, if not the full spectrum of migrant life, at least an important part of it.

In section two Shah refocuses his examination of court records on the discourse by which authorities classified and regulated populations. There existed, he argues, a kind of "legal borderlands" in the early twentieth century, with fraught implications for South Asians. In addition to the question of racial status, court systems in the U.S. and Canada were grappling with definitions of sodomy, age of consent, and other concepts intrinsic to the regulation of male transient populations. The legal clarification of these terms often melded conceptions of race and sexuality to the detriment of South Asians. In turn, the legal regulation of non-normative sexual and interracial associations influenced the formation of immigration and citizenship policy for South Asians, covered in section three. The US and Canadian governments struggled to square policy decisions with their racialized conceptions of South Asian sexuality. If, for instance, they excluded female migrants attempting to join their husbands for fear of endorsing polygamy, they risked encouraging interracial marriages between South Asian and local women. For their part, some migrants and their family members emphasized their normative familial characteristics to make themselves eligible for residence and citizenship. In this way, Shah demonstrates that the consequences of everyday interactions could reach to the level of the nation-state.

South Asians are an understudied segment of the North American population, and while *Stranger Intimacy* is not a conventional social history it makes a significant contribution to historical scholarship on that level. But Shah realizes a broader objective, to show how the history of even a small (in numerical terms) minority has important implications for the ways in which all Americans understand the parameters of citizenship. In his conclusion he draws on his research to challenge normative conceptions of the nuclear family that have buttressed immigration or marriage policies and marginalized different populations. Greater attention to stranger intimacy, he concludes, will help historians understand the evolution of human sociability and “produce fresh ways of seeing, knowing, and organizing social, cultural, and political worlds” (273).

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**CALIFORNIA CRACKUP: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It.** By Joe Mathews and Mark Paul. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010. 240 pp. \$19.95 paper.) Reviewed by Susan McWilliams.



When things are really dire, it's tempting to direct blame on some easy or proximate scapegoat. Californians may be part of a “great exception” in many ways, but they are no exception to that general rule: When asked to account for the disarray of state politics, they are likely to focus blame on current officeholders—recent approval ratings for the legislature are barely treading above the single-digit waterline—or the particular policies of whatever political party or parties they like least. Democrats blame Republicans for fomenting an anti-tax mania that bankrupts public institutions; Republicans blame Democrats for holding the state hostage to public unions; and independent voters blame both Republicans and Democrats for, well, being Republicans and Democrats—for toeing party lines

rather than finding agreement on some transcendent, or even just coherent, political vision.

In the opening of their book, Joe Mathews and Mark Paul, both longtime watchers of the California scene, decry this kind of political shortsightedness. Theirs is a welcome attempt to stand above the political fray, a conscious effort to follow in the model of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose aspiration “to see not differently but further than any party” animates their analysis and argument. While



others are busy with today, and even scholars tend to focus their energies on the relatively recent debacles of Propositions 13 and 98, Mathews and Paul want us to see an even bigger picture.

If their book did merely what its subtitle promises—to offer an explanation of *How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It*—it would be an ambitious tome. But, in fact, *California Crackup* goes much deeper than that. In Mathews and Paul's telling, it is not merely a series of ill-considered reforms which have broken this 31<sup>st</sup> state in the union (though they have added plenty of momentum to the wrecking ball), but more fundamentally an ersatz approach to lawmaking that dates back to California's founding.

Mathews and Paul take us back to California's original constitution, "drafted at a rogue gathering convened by the military on behalf of a state the US government had failed to recognize" (17), through the ham-handed attempts to make that document work, and to the fateful 1879 convention which culminated in a second constitution so unwieldy that even its framers didn't want to read it. (That's no exaggeration. Astoundingly, the convention delegates decided to vote on the whole constitution without listening to a reading of it first; they thought it would take too long. The constitution became law before a single person had considered the document in its entirety.)

With forefathers like that, it's no wonder that Californians have been eager political reformers. It's not just that people in this state are moved by a spirit of innovation, enamored of newness, and unimpressed by claims of ancestry or tradition. Though that may be the case, it is also and more fundamentally true that Californians have *needed* to be political reformers and fixers. The messiness of the state's founding documents left its people with little choice.

That said, as this book emphasizes, Californians have not seemed to learn the critical lessons that the story of those constitutional conventions should have taught them: great care is required to create great laws; and complicated rules are not better rules; and every change to a system has at least some unintended, negative consequences. Too often, Californians have ridden waves of political reform without considering what things might look like when the wave hits the shore. The story of political reform in California is a story of political naiveté. For instance, voters approved Proposition 98 believing that they were helping to fix the state's education system, without seeming to realize that in fact they were hampering the legislature's ability to legislate. Then, not long after Proposition 98's passage, Californians amped up their complaint that the legislature doesn't do enough, without connecting the obvious dots. More broadly, the initiative system, which Californians have embraced on the idea that it gives more power to the people, has in fact created a budgetary system so complicated that even political experts—let alone the people—can't understand it. In this way, California has out-byzantined Byzantium.

This argument, though, takes an ironic turn. Even as Mathews and Paul recognize, rightly, that a kind of wide-eyed optimism about the possibilities of reform has led to many of California's most serious political ills, the second half of this book is dedicated to a series of proposals for reform that at times seems a little, well,

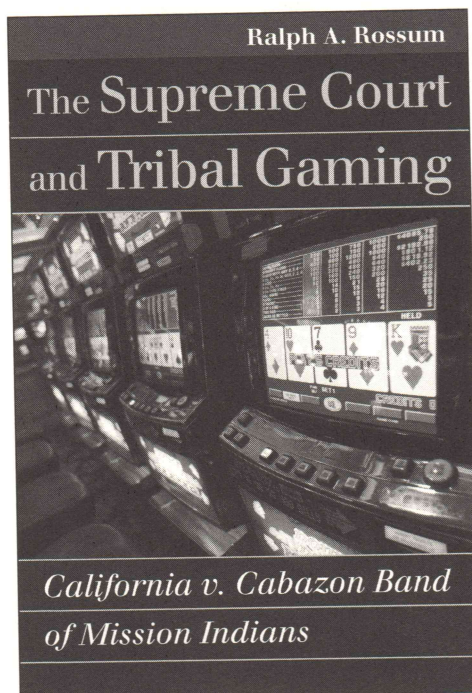


wide-eyed and overly optimistic. The authors' argument that a system of proportional representation would go far to relieving the state's political ills, for instance, glosses over the many known limitations of such a system—one of which is that over time, it hampers the legislature's ability to legislate.

That aside, much of what Mathews and Paul do propose at the level of policy is indeed sensible and well justified. Their arguments on behalf of the need to energize the legislature are particularly important, since they not only demonstrate clearly the ways in which a stronger legislative branch would be logistically and democratically desirable but also prove the inanity of our contemporary dogma that smaller government is always better government. If California, which has brought so many ideas to the nation at large, were in fact to embrace that teaching and rediscover the goodness in government, not just this state but the United States would work much better.

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THE SUPREME COURT AND TRIBAL GAMING: *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*. By Ralph A. Rossum. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011. 216 pp. \$16.95 paper.) Reviewed by Kevin Whalen.



Since the mid-1980s, tribal gaming has become an integral part of social and political life in southern California. An hour-long drive east from Los Angeles proves as much. Along Interstate 10, casinos at the Cabazon and Morongo reservations feature resplendent hotels and entertainment centers that stretch skyward from the desert floor. How, one might wonder, did all of this start? In *The Supreme Court and Tribal Gaming: California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*, legal scholar Ralph A. Rossum presents a meticulously researched account of how the Cabazon and Morongo Tribes of Missions Indians won the right to operate high-stakes bingo rooms in California. Along the way, Rossum explores the roots of federal Indian law and native sovereignty, and tracks the consequences of

*California v. Cabazon Band* across Indian country.

In October of 1980, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians opened card and bingo rooms on their reservation, located in Indio, California. Within three days, city police officers raided and shut down the casino. Back-and-forth legal wrangling ensued, with the Cabazon and Morongo Bands of Mission Indians eventually

winning from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals the right to keep their gaming operations running. The state of California stepped in to challenge this ruling, eventually taking the case all the way to the Supreme Court. Here Rossum introduces the reader to a key legal concept upon which *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians* would hinge. Passed by Congress in 1954, Public Law 280 gave a handful of states, including California, jurisdiction over crimes committed by Native Americans on reservations. Could the state of California regulate, or even abolish Indian gaming on the basis of this law?

Before addressing this question, the author casts his gaze backwards to the construction of Indian law, from European settlement onward. Rossum pays special attention to judgments written by Chief Justice John Marshall—*Cherokee v. Georgia*, *Worcester v. Georgia*, and *Johnson v. McIntosh*. Often referred to as “The Marshall Trilogy,” these cases established principles that would come to underlie Indian law in the United States. Here Rossum provides concise legal analysis of the much-analyzed state of “domestic dependency,” which limited the authority of tribes to convey land, deal with foreign powers, and engage in external commerce without congressional approval.

In chapter three, Rossum examines the development of a unique canon, or method of interpreting vague areas within legislation, in Indian law. This canon requires that all treaties, statutes, and executive orders be interpreted liberally in the favor of tribes. But, argues Rossum, interpretation of laws relating to Native Americans has been deeply tied to broader currents of thought regarding indigenous peoples. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, legislators and bureaucrats wished to promote the assimilation of Indians into the broader white Protestant culture. This desire faded in the 1930s as Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier pushed for his version of tribal self-determination, but returned with efforts for tribal termination in the 1950s. Historians will find Rossum’s thorough legal analysis a fine complement to histories of assimilation and self-determination from scholars such as Francis Paul Prucha and Frederick E. Hoxie.

After carefully reconstructing the development of Indian law in the United States, Rossum turns to the Supreme Court’s hearing of the *Cabazon* case in 1986 and 1987. The state of California presented to the Supreme Court multiple justifications for its prohibition of Indian gambling, but focused especially on the idea that Public Law 280 allowed states to enforce gambling laws on Indian reservations. Writing for the majority, Justice Raymond White ruled that Public Law 280 allowed states to enforce regulatory, but not prohibitory, laws on reservations. Since California allowed bingo for charitable purposes, laws related to bingo could only be classified as regulatory and not prohibitory. Therefore, California could not prohibit bingo on reservations. Only the federal government, said White, could regulate gaming on reservations. Moreover, argued White, since gaming would aid tribal sovereignty, it should be allowed. Finally, the Morongo and Cabazon bands had won the right to operate bingo rooms on their reservations.

Rossum finishes by tracking reverberations that moved outward from *Cabazon* across Indian country. In 1988, congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which solidified the rights of tribes to open bingo parlors. More importantly,

the act allowed federally recognized tribes to negotiate compacts with states that would allow them to engage in “Las Vegas-style” gaming, including slot machines, poker, and other high-stakes games. Faced with reluctant state governments, tribes in California, Connecticut, and Florida all managed to negotiate compacts by agreeing to share portions of their profits. As state governments across the United States deal with budget shortfalls, many look to tribal gaming compacts in order to shore up their finances. Here Rossum’s analysis speaks clearly to an issue that has become increasingly important in recent years.

Those in search of indigenous voices and perspectives within the realm of tribal gaming will not find them in *The Supreme Court and Tribal Gaming*. To be sure, Rossum acknowledges efforts among native peoples to “exercise their own norms and values in structuring their collective futures”—a concept he labels “cultural sovereignty.” For the most part, though, the author focuses almost exclusively on legal constructions of tribal sovereignty, and native voices appear sparingly. How might this story look different if tribal perspectives accompanied the legal narrative throughout?

This is a small concern. With *The Supreme Court and Tribal Gaming*, Ralph Rossum has crafted a compelling narrative of a critical moment in American Indian Law. Rossum ably places tribal gaming clearly within a legal historical context. In so doing, he clarifies the complex relationships between gaming, tribal sovereignty, and state regulatory power. While many recent works explore tribal gaming, Rossum’s study stands out for its clear examination of historical context and judicial precedence within a single legal case. For scholars who seek to understand this increasingly important issue, *The Supreme Court and Tribal Gaming* will be required reading for years to come.

*Kevin Whalen is a PhD candidate in history at the University of California, Riverside.*



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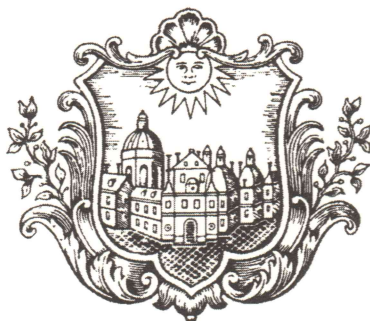
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